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COME RACK! COME ROPE!

BY
ROBERT HUGH BENSON.

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. I.

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IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

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PREFACE.

VERY nearly the whole of this book is sober historical fact; and by far the greater number of the personages named in it once lived and acted in the manner in which I have presented them. My hero and my heroine are fictitious; so also are the parents of my heroine, the father of my hero, one lawyer, one woman, two servants, a farmer and his wife, the landlord of an inn, and a few other entirely negligible characters. But the family of the FitzHerberts passed precisely through the fortunes which I have described; they had their confessors and their one traitor (as I have said). Mr. Anthony Babington plotted, and fell, in the manner that is related; Mary languished in Chartley under Sir Amyas Paulet; was assisted by Mr. Bourgoign; was betrayed by

her secretary and Mr. Gifford, and died at Fotheringay; Mr. Garlick and Mr. Ludlam and Mr. Simpson received their vocations, passed through their adventures; were captured at Padley, and died in Derby. Father Campion (from whose speech after torture the title of the book is taken) suffered on the rack and was executed at Tyburn. Mr. Topcliffe tormented the Catholics that fell into his hands; plotted with Mr. Thomas FitzHerbert, and bargained for Padley (which he subsequently lost again) on the terms here drawn out. My Lord Shrewsbury rode about Derbyshire, directed the search for recusants and presided at their deaths; priests of all kinds came and went in disguise; Mr. Owen went about constructing hiding-holes; Mr. Bassett lived defiantly at Langleys, and dabbled a little (I am afraid) in occultism; Mr. Fenton was often to be found in Hathersage—all these things took place as nearly as I have had the power of relating them. Two localities only, I think, are disguised under their names—Booth's Edge and Matstead. Padley, or rather the chapel in which the last mass was said

under the circumstances described in this book, remains to this day, close to Grindleford Station. A Catholic pilgrimage is made there every year; and I have myself once had the honour of preaching on such an occasion, leaning against the wall of the old hall that is immediately beneath the chapel where Mr. Garlick and Mr. Ludlam said their last masses, and were captured. If the book is too sensational, it is no more sensational than life itself was to Derbyshire folk between 1579 and 1588.

It remains only, first, to express my extreme indebtedness to Dom Bede Camm's erudite book—"Forgotten Shrines"—from which I have taken immense quantities of information, and to a pile of some twenty to thirty other books that are before me as I write these words; and, secondly, to ask forgiveness from the distinguished family that takes its name from the Fitz-Herberts and is descended from them directly; and to assure its members that old Sir Thomas, Mr. John, Mr. Anthony, and all the rest, down to the present day, out-

weigh a thousand times over (to the minds of all decent people) the stigma of Mr. Thomas' name. Even the apostles numbered one Judas!

ROBERT HUGH BENSON.

Feast of the Blessed Thomas More, 1912.
Hare Street House, Buntingford.

· COME RACK! COME ROPE!

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

I.

THERE should be no sight more happy than a young man riding to meet his love. His eyes should shine, his lips should sing; he should slap his mare upon her shoulder and call her his darling. The puddles upon his way should be turned to pure gold, and the stream that runs beside him should chatter her name.

Yet, as Robin rode to Marjorie none of these things were done. It was a still day of frost; the sky was arched above him, across the high hills, like that terrible crystal which is the vault above which sits God—hard blue from horizon to horizon; the fringe of feathery birches stood like filigree-work above him on his left; on his right ran the Derwent, sucking softly among his sedges; on this side and that lay the flat bottom through

which he went—meadowland broken by rushes; his mare Cecily stepped along, now cracking the thin ice of the little pools with her dainty feet, now going gently over peaty ground, blowing thin clouds from her red nostrils, yet unencouraged by word or caress from her rider; who sat, heavy and all but slouching, staring with his blue eyes under puckered eyelids, as if he went to an appointment which he would not keep.

Yet he was a very pleasant lad to look upon, smooth-faced and gallant, mounted and dressed in a manner that should give any lad joy. He wore great gauntlets on his hands; he was in his habit of green; he had his steel-buckled leather belt upon him beneath his cloak and a pair of daggers in it, with his long-sword looped up; he had his felt hat on his head, buckled again, and decked with half a pheasant's tail; he had his long boots of undressed leather, that rose above his knees; and on his left wrist sat his grim falcon Agnes, hooded and belled, not because he rode after game, but from mere custom, and to give her the air.

He was meeting his first man's trouble.

Last year he had said good-bye to Derby Grammar School—of old my lord Bishop Durdant's foundation—situated in St. Peter's churchyard. Here he had done the right and usual things: he had learned his grammar; he had fought; he had been chastised; he had robbed the effigy of his pious founder in a patched doublet with a saucepan on his head (but that had been done before he had learned veneration)—and so had gone home again to Matstead, proficient in Latin, English, history, writing, good manners and chess, to live with his father, to hunt, to hear mass when a priest was within reason-

able distance, to indite painful letters now and then on matters of the estate, and to learn how to bear himself generally as should one of Master's rank—the son of a gentleman who bore arms, and his father's father before him. He dined at twelve, he supped at six, he said his prayers, and blessed himself when no strangers were by. He was something of a herbalist, as a sheer hobby of his own; he went to feed his falcons in the morning, he rode with them after dinner (from last August he had found himself riding north more often than south, since Marjorie lived in that quarter); and now all had been crowned last Christmas Eve, when in the enclosed garden at her house he had kissed her two hands suddenly, and made her a little speech he had learned by heart; after which he kissed her on the lips as a man should, in the honest noon sunlight.

All this was as it should be. There were no doubts or disasters anywhere. Marjorie was an only daughter as he an only son. Her father, it is true, was but a Derby lawyer, but he and his wife had a good little estate above the Hathersage valley, and a stone house in it. As for religion, that was all well too. Master Manners was as good a Catholic as Master Audrey himself; and the families met at mass perhaps as much as four or five times in the year, either at Padley, where Sir Thomas' chapel still had priests coming and going; sometimes at Dethick in the Babingtons' barn; sometimes as far north as Harewood.

And now a man's trouble was come upon the boy. The cause of it was as follows.

Robin Audrey was no more religious than a boy of seventeen should be. Yet he had had as few doubts

about the matter as if he had been a monk. His mother had taught him well, up to the time of her death ten years ago; and he had learned from her, as well as from his father when that professor spoke of it at all, that there were two kinds of religion in the world, the true and the false—that is to say, the Catholic religion and the other one. Certainly there were shades of differences in the other one; the Turk did not believe precisely as the ancient Roman, nor yet as the modern Protestant—yet these distinctions were subtle and negligible; they were all swallowed up in an unity of falsehood. Next he had learned that the Catholic religion was at present blown upon by many persons in high position; that pains and penalties lay upon all who adhered to it. Sir Thomas FitzHerbert, for instance, lay now in the Fleet in London on that very account. His own father, too, three or four times in the year, was under necessity of paying over heavy sums for the privilege of not attending Protestant worship; and, indeed, had been forced last year to sell a piece of land over on Lees Moor for this very purpose. Priests came and went at their peril. . . . He himself had fought two or three battles over the affair in St. Peter's churchyard, until he had learned to hold his tongue. But all this was just part of the game. It seemed to him as inevitable and eternal as the changes of the weather. Matstead Church, he knew, had once been Catholic; but how long ago he did not care to enquire. He only knew that for awhile there had been some doubt on the matter; and that before Mr. Barton's time, who was now minister there, there had been a proper priest in the place, who had read English prayers there and a sort

of a mass, which he had attended as a little boy. Then this had ceased; the priest had gone and Mr. Barton come, and since that time he had never been to church there, but had heard the real mass wherever he could with a certain secrecy. And there might be further perils in future, as there might be thunderstorms or floods. There was still the memory of the descent of the Commissioners a year or two after his birth; he had been brought up on the stories of riding and counter-riding, and the hiding away of altar-plate and beads and vestments. But all this was in his bones and his blood; it was as natural that professors of the false religion should seek to injure and distress professors of the true, as that the foxes should attack the poultry-yard. One took one's precautions, one hoped for the best; and one was quite sure that one day the happy ancient times his mother had told him of would come back, and Christ's cause be vindicated.

And now the foundations of the earth were moved and heaven reeled above him; for his father, after a month or two of brooding, had announced, on St. Stephen's Day, that he could tolerate it no longer; that God's demands were unreasonable; that, after all, the Protestant religion was the religion of her Grace, that men must learn to move with the times, and that he had paid his last fine. At Easter, he observed, he would take the bread and wine in Matstead Church, and Robin would take them too.

II.

The sun stood half-way towards his setting as Robin rode up from the valley, past Padley, over the steep

ascent that led towards Booth's Edge. The boy was brighter a little as he came up; he had counted above eighty snipe within the last mile and a half, and he was coming near to Marjorie. About him, rising higher as he rose, stood the great low-backed hills. Cecily stepped out more sharply, snuffing delicately, for she knew her way well enough by now, and looked for a feed; and the boy's perplexities stood off from him a little. Matters must surely be better so soon as Marjorie's clear eyes looked upon them.

Then the roofs of Padley disappeared behind him, and he saw the smoke going up from the little timbered Hall, standing back against its bare wind-blown trees.

A great clatter and din of barking broke out as the mare's hoofs sounded on the half-paved space before the great door; and then, in the pause, a gagging of geese, solemn and earnest, from out of sight. Jacob led the outcry, a great mastiff, chained by the entrance, of the breed of which three are set to meet a bear and four a lion. Then two harriers whipped round the corner, and a terrier's head showed itself over the wall of the herb-garden on the left, as a man, bareheaded, in his shirt and breeches, ran out suddenly with a thonged whip, in time to meet a pair of spaniels in full career. Robin sat his horse silently till peace was restored, his right leg flung across the pommel, untwisting Agnes' leash from his fist. Then he asked for Mistress Marjorie, and dropped to the ground, leaving his mare and falcon in the man's hands, with an air.

He flicked his fingers to growling Jacob as he went past to the side entrance on the east, stepped in through

the little door that was beside the great one, and passed on as he had been bidden into the little court, turned to the left, went up an outside staircase, and so down a little passage to the ladies' parlour, where he knocked upon the door. The voice he knew called to him from within; and he went in, smiling to himself. Then he took the girl who awaited him there in both his arms, and kissed her twice—first her hands and then her lips, for respect should come first and ardour second.

"My love," said Robin, and threw off his hat with the pheasant's tail, for coolness' sake.

It was a sweet room this which he already knew by heart; for it was here that he had sat with Marjorie and her mother, silent and confused, evening after evening, last autumn; it was here, too, that she had led him last Christmas Eve, scarcely ten days ago, after he had kissed her in the enclosed garden. But the low frosty sunlight lay in it now, upon the blue painted wainscot that rose half up the walls, the tall presses where the linen lay, the pieces of stuff, embroidered with pale lutes and wreaths that Mistress Manners had bought in Derby, hanging now over the plaster spaces. There was a chimney, too, newly built, that was thought a great luxury; and in it burned an armful of logs, for the girl was setting out new linen for the household, and the scents of lavender and burning wood disputed the air between them.

"I thought it would be you," she said, "when I heard the dogs."

She piled the last rolls of linen in an ordered heap,

and came to sit beside him. Robin took one hand in his and sat silent.

She was of an age with him, perhaps a month the younger; and, as it ought to be, was his very contrary in all respects. Where he was fair, she was pale and dark; his eyes were blue, hers black; he was lusty and showed promise of broadness, she was slender.

"And what news do you bring with you now?" she said presently.

He evaded this.

"Mistress Manners?" he asked.

"Mother has a megrim," she said; "she is in her chamber." And she smiled at him again. For these two, as is the custom of young persons who love one another, had said not a word on either side—neither he to his father nor she to her parents. They believed, as young persons do, that parents who bring children into the world, hold it as a chief danger that these children should follow their example, and themselves be married. Besides, there is something delicious in secrecy.

"Then I will kiss you again," he said, "while there is opportunity."

Making love is a very good way to pass the time, above all when that same time presses and other disconcerting things should be spoken of instead; and this device Robin now learned. He spoke of a hundred things that were of no importance: of the dress that she wore—russet, as it should be, for country girls, with the loose sleeves folded back above her elbows that she might handle the linen; her apron of coarse linen, her

steel-buckled shoes. He told her that he loved her better in that than in her costume of state—the ruff, the fardingale, the brocaded petticoat, and all the rest—in which he had seen her once last summer at Babington House. He talked then, when she would hear no more of that, of Tuesday seven-night, when they would meet for hawking in the lower chase of the Padley estates; and proceeded then to speak of Agnes, whom he had left on the fist of the man who had taken his mare, of her increasing infirmities and her crimes of crabbing; and all the while he held her left hand in both of his, and fitted her fingers between his, and kissed them again when he had no more to say on any one point; and wondered why he could not speak of the matter on which he had come, and how he should tell her. And then at last she drew it from him.

“And now, my Robin,” she said, “tell me what you have in your mind. You have talked of this and that and Agnes and Jock, and Padley chase, and you have not once looked me in the eyes since you first came in.”

Now it was not shame that had held him from telling her, but rather a kind of bewilderment. The affair might hold shame, indeed, or anger, or sorrow, or complacency, but he did not know; and he wished, as young men of decent birth should wish, to present the proper emotion on its right occasion. He had pondered on the matter continually since his father had spoken to him on Saint Stephen’s night; and at one time it seemed that his father was acting the part of a traitor and at another of a philosopher. If it were indeed true, after all, that all men were turning Protestant, and that there

was not so much difference between the two religions, then it would be the act of a wise man to turn Protestant too, if only for awhile. And on the other hand his pride of birth and his education by his mother and his practice ever since drew him hard the other way. He was in a strait between the two. He did not know what to think, and he feared what Marjorie might think.

It was this, then, that had held him silent. He feared what Marjorie might think, for that was the very thing that he thought that he thought too, and he foresaw a hundred inconveniences and troubles if it were so.

"How did you know I had anything in my mind?" he asked. "Is it not enough reason for my coming that you should be here?"

She laughed softly, with a pleasant scornfulness.

"I read you like a printed book," she said. "What else are women's wits given them for?"

He fell to stroking her hand again at that, but she drew it away.

"Not until you have told me," she said.

So then he told her.

It was a long tale, for it began as far ago as last August, when his father had come back from giving evidence before the justices at Derby on a matter of witchcraft, and had been questioned again about his religion. It was then that Robin had seen moodiness succeed to anger, and long silence to moodiness. He told the tale with a true lover's art, for he watched her face and trained his tone and his manner as he saw her thoughts come and go in her eyes and lips, like gusts of wind across standing corn; and at last he told

her outright what his father had said to him on St. Stephen's night, and how he himself had kept silence.

Marjorie's face was as white as a moth's wing when he was finishing, and her eyes like sunset pools; but she flamed up bright and rosy as he finished.

"You kept silence!" she cried.

"I did not wish to anger him, my dear; he is my father," he said gently.

The colour died out of her face again and she nodded once or twice, and a great pensiveness came down on her. He took her hand again softly, and she did not resist.

"The only doubt," she said presently, as if she talked to herself, "is whether you had best be gone at Easter, or stay and face it out."

"Yes," said Robin, with his dismay come fully to the birth.

Then she turned on him, full of a sudden tenderness and compassion.

"Oh! my Robin," she cried, "and I have not said a word about you and your own misery. I was thinking but of Christ's honour. You must forgive me. . . . What must it be for you! . . . That it should be your father! You are sure that he means it?"

"My father does not speak until he means it. He is always like that. He asks counsel from no one. He thinks and he thinks, and then he speaks; and it is finished."

She fell then to thinking again, her sweet lips compressed together, and her eyes frightened and wondering, searching round the hanging above the chimney-breast.

(It presented Icarus in the chariot of the sun; and it was said in Derby that it had come from my lord Abbot's lodging at Bolton.)

Meantime Robin thought too. He was as wax in the hands of this girl, and knew it, and loved that it should be so. Yet he could not help his dismay while he waited for her seal to come down on him and stamp him to her model. For he foresaw more clearly than ever now the hundred inconveniences that must follow, now that it was evident that to Marjorie's mind (and, therefore, to God Almighty's) there must be no tampering with the old religion. He had known that it must be so; yet he had thought, on the way here, of a dozen families he knew who, in his own memory, had changed from allegiance to the Pope of Rome to that of her Grace, without seeming one penny the worse. There were the Martins, down there in Derby; the Squire and his lady of Ashenden Hall; the Conways of Matlock; and the rest—these had all changed; and though he did not respect them for it, yet the truth was that they were not yet stricken by thunderbolts or eaten by the plague. He had wondered whether there were not a way to do as they had done, yet without the disgrace of it. . . . However, this was plainly not to be so with him. He must put up with the inconveniences as well as he could, and he just waited to hear from Marjorie how this must be done.

She turned to him again at last. Twice her lips opened to speak, and twice she closed them again. Robin continued to stroke her hand and wait for judgment. The third time she spoke.

"I think you must go away," she said, "for Easter.

Tell your father that you cannot change your religion simply because he tells you so. I do not see what else is to be done. He will think, perhaps, that if you have a little time to think you will come over to him. Well, that is not so, but it may make it easier for him to believe it for awhile. . . . You must go somewhere where there is a priest. . . . Where can you go?"

Robin considered.

"I could go to Dethick," he said.

"That is not far enough away, I think."

"I could come here," he suggested artfully.

A smile lit in her eyes, shone in her mouth, and passed again into seriousness.

"That is scarcely a mile further," she said. "We must think. . . . Will he be very angry, Robin?"

Robin smiled grimly.

"I have never withstood him in a great affair," he said. "He is angry enough over little things."

"Poor Robin!"

"Oh! he is not unjust to me. He is a good father to me."

"That makes it all the sadder," she said.

"And there is no other way?" he asked presently.

She glanced at him.

"Unless you would withstand him to the face. Would you do that, Robin?"

"I will do anything you tell me," he said simply.

"You darling! . . . Well, Robin, listen to me. It is very plain that sooner or later you will have to withstand him. You cannot go away every time there is communion at Matstead, or, indeed, every Sunday. Your father would have to pay the fines for you, I have no

doubt, unless you went away altogether. But I think you had better go away for this time. He will almost expect it, I think. At first he will think that you will yield to him; and then, little by little (unless God's grace brings himself back to the Faith), he will learn to understand that you will not. But it will be easier for him that way; and he will have time to think what to do with you, too. . . . Robin, what would you do if you went away?"

Robin considered again.

"I can read and write," he said. "I am a Latinist. I can train falcons and hounds and break horses. I do not know if there is anything else that I can do."

"You darling!" she said again.

These two, as will have been seen, were as simple as children, and as serious. Children are not gay and lighthearted, except now and then (just as men and women are not serious except now and then). They are grave and considering: all that they lack is experience. These two, then, were real children; they were grave and serious because a great thing had disclosed itself to them in which two or three large principles were present, and no more. There was that love of one another, whose consummation seemed imperilled, for how could these two ever wed if Robin were to quarrel with his father? There was the Religion which was in their bones and blood—the Religion for which already they had suffered and their fathers before them. There was the honour and loyalty which this new and more personal suffering demanded now louder than ever; and, in Marjorie at least, as will be seen more plainly later,

there was a strong love of Jesus Christ and His Mother, whom she knew, from her hidden crucifix and her beads, and her Jesus Psalter—which she used every day, as well as in her own soul—to be wandering together once more among the hills of Derbyshire, sheltering, at peril of Their lives, in stables and barns and little secret chambers, because there was no room for Them in Their own places. It was this last consideration, as Robin had begun to guess, that stood strongest in the girl; it was this, too, as again he had begun to guess, that made her all that she was to him, that gave her that strange serious air of innocency and sweetness, and drew from him a love that was nine-tenths reverence and adoration. (He always kissed her hands first, it will be remembered, before her lips.)

So then they sat and considered and talked. They did not speak much of her Grace, nor of her Grace's religion, nor of her counsellors and affairs of state: these things were but toys and vanities compared with matters of love and faith; neither did they speak much of the Commissioners that had been to Derbyshire once and would come again, or of the alarms and the dangers and the priest hunters, since those things did not at present touch them very closely. It was rather of Robin's father, and whether and when the maid should tell her parents, and how this new trouble would conflict with their love. They spoke, that is to say, of their own business and of God's; and of nothing else. The frosty sunshine crept down the painted wainscot and lay at last at their feet, reddening to rosiness. . .

III.

Robin rode away at last with a very clear idea of what he was to do in the immediate present, and with no idea at all of what was to be done later. Marjorie had given him three things—advice; a pair of beads that had been the property of Mr. Cuthbert Maine, seminary priest, recently executed in Cornwall for his religion; and a kiss—the first deliberate, free-will kiss she had ever given him. The first he was to keep, the second he was to return, the third he was to remember; and these three things, or, rather, his consideration of them, worked upon him as he went. Her advice, besides that which has been described, was, principally, to say his Jesus Psalter more punctually, to hear mass whenever that were possible, to trust in God, and to be patient and submissive with his father in all things that did not touch divine love and faith. The pair of beads that were once Mr. Maine's, he was to keep upon him always, day and night, and to use them for his devotions. The kiss—well, he was to remember this, and to return it to her upon their next meeting.

A great star came out as he drew near home. His path took him not through the village, but behind it, near enough for him to hear the barkings of the dogs and to smell upon the frosty air the scent of the wood fires. The house was a great one for these parts. There was a small gate-house before it, built by his father for dignity, with a lodge on either side and an arch in the middle, and beyond this lay the short road, straight and broad, that went up to the court of the house. This court was, on three sides of it, buildings;

the hall and the buttery and the living-rooms in the midst, with the stables and falconry on the left, and the servants' lodgings on the right; the fourth side, that which lay opposite to the little gate-house, was a wall, with a great double gate in it, hung on stone posts that had, each of them, a great stone dog that held a blank shield. All this later part, the wall with the gate, the stables and the servants' lodgings, as well as the gate-house without, had been built by the lad's father twenty years ago, to bring home his wife to; for, until that time, the house had been but a little place, though built of stone, and solid and good enough. The house stood half-way up the rise of the hill, above the village, with woods about it and behind it; and it was above these woods behind that the great star came out like a diamond in enamel-work; and Robin looked at it, and fell to thinking of Marjorie again, putting all other thoughts away. Then, as he rode through into the court onto the cobbled stones, a man ran out from the stable to take his mare from him.

"Master Babington is here," he said. "He came half an hour ago."

"He is in the hall?"

"Yes, sir; they are at supper."

The hall at Matstead was such as that of most esquires of means. Its daïs was to the south end, and the buttery entrance and the screens to the north, through which came the servers with the meat. In the midst of the floor stood the reredos with the fire against it, and a round vent overhead in the roof through which went the smoke and came the rain. The tables stood

down the hall, one on either side, with the master's table at the day's end set cross-ways. It was not a great hall, though that was its name; it ran perhaps forty feet by twenty. It was lighted, not only by the fire that burned there through the winter day and night, but by eight torches in cressets that hung against the walls and sadly smoked them; and the master's table was lighted by six candles, of latten on common days and of silver upon festivals.

There were but two at the master's table this evening, Mr. Audrey himself, a smallish, high-shouldered man, ruddy-faced, with bright blue eyes like his son's, and no hair upon his face (for this was the way of old men then, in the country, at least); and Mr. Anthony Babington, a young man scarcely a year older than Robin himself, of a brown complexion and a high look in his face, but a little pale, too, with study, for he was learned beyond his years and read all the books that he could lay hand to. It was said even that his own verses, and a prose-lament he had written upon the Death of a Hound, were read with pleasure in London by the lords and gentlemen. It was as long ago as '71, that his verses had first become known, when he was still serving in the school of good manners as page in my Lord Shrewsbury's household. They were considered remarkable for so young a boy. So it was to this company that Robin came, walking up between the tables after he had washed his hands at the lavatory that stood by the screens.

"You are late, lad," said his father.

"I was over to Padley, sir. . . . Good day, Anthony."

Then silence fell again, for it was the custom in

good houses to keep silence, or very nearly, at dinner and supper. At times music would play, if there was music to be had; or a scholar would read from a book for awhile at the beginning, from the holy gospels in devout households, or from some other grave book. But if there were neither music nor reading, all would hold their tongues.

Robin was hungry from his riding and the keen air; and he ate well. First he stayed his appetite a little with a hunch of cheat-bread, and a glass of pomage, while the servant was bringing him his entry of eggs cooked with parsley. Then he ate this; and next came half a wild-duck cooked with sage and sweet potatoes; and last of all a florentine which he ate with a cup of Canarian. He ate heartily and quickly, while the two waited for him and nibbled at marchpane. Then, when the doors were flung open and the troop of servants came in to their supper, Mr. Audrey blessed himself, and for them, too; and they went out by a door behind into the wainscotted parlour, where the new stove from London stood, and where the conserves and muscadell awaited them. For this, or like it, had been the procedure in Matstead hall ever since Robin could remember, when first he had come from the women to eat his food with the men.

"And how were all at Booth's Edge?" asked Mr. Audrey, when all had pulled off their boots in country fashion, and were sitting each with his glass beside him. (Through the door behind came the clamour of the farm-men and the keepers of the chase and the servants, over their food.)

"I saw Marjorie only, sir," said the boy. "Mr. Manners was in Derby, and Mrs. Manners had a megrim."

"Mrs. Manners is ageing swifter than her husband," observed Anthony.

There seemed a constraint upon the company this evening. Robin spoke of his ride, of things which he had seen upon it, of a wood that should be thinned next year; and Anthony made a quip or two such as he was accustomed to make; but the master sat silent for the most part, speaking to the lads once or twice for civility's sake, but no more. And presently silences began to fall, that were very unusual things in Mr. Anthony's company, for he had a quick and a gay wit, and talked enough for five. Robin knew very well what was the matter; it was what lay upon his own heart as heavy as lead; but he was sorry that the signs of it should be so evident, and wondered what he should say to his friend Anthony when the time came for telling; since Anthony was as ardent for the old Faith as any in the land. It was a bitter time, this, for the old families that served God as their fathers had, and desired to serve their prince too; for, now and again, the rumour would go abroad that another house had fallen, and another name gone from the old roll. And what would Anthony Babington say, thought the lad, when he heard that Mr. Audrey, who had been so hot and persevered so long, must be added to these?

And then, on a sudden, Anthony himself opened on a matter that was at least cognate.

"I was hearing to-day from Mr. Thomas FitzHerbert that his uncle would be let out again of the Fleet soon to collect his fines."

He spoke bitterly; and, indeed, there was reason; for not only were the recusants (as the Catholics were named) put in prison for their faith, but fined for it as well, and let out of prison to raise money for this, by selling their farms or estates.

"He will go to Norbury?" asked Robin.

"He will come to Padley, too, it is thought. Her Grace must have her money for her ships and her men, and for her pursuivants to catch us all with; and it is we that must pay. Shall you sell again this year, sir?"

Mr. Audrey shook his head, pursing up his lips and staring upon the fire.

"I can sell no more," he said.

Then an agony seized upon Robin lest his father should say all that was in his mind. He knew it must be said; yet he feared its saying, and with a quick wit he spoke of that which he knew would divert his friend.

"And the Queen of the Scots," he said. "Have you heard more of her?"

Now Anthony Babington was one of those spirits that live largely within themselves, and therefore see that which is without through a haze or mist of their own moods. He read much in the poets; you would say that Vergil and Ovid, as well as the poets of his own day, were his friends; he lived within, surrounded by his own images, and therefore he loved and hated with ten times the ardour of a common man. He was furious for the Old Faith, furious against the new; he dreamed of wars and gallantry and splendour; you could see it even in his dress, in his furred doublet, the embroideries at his throat, his silver-hilted rapier, as well as in his port and countenance: and the burning heart

of all his images, the mirror on earth of Mary in heaven, the emblem of his piety, the mistress of his dreams—she who embodied for him what the courtiers in London protested that Elizabeth embodied for them—the pearl of great price, the one among ten thousand—this, for him, was Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, now prisoner in her cousin's hands, going to and fro from house to house, with a guard about her, yet with all the seeming of liberty and none of its reality. . . .

The rough bitterness died out of the boy's face, and a look came upon it as of one who sees a vision.

"Queen Mary?" he said, as if he pronounced the name of the Mother of God. "Yes; I have heard of her. . . . She is in Norfolk, I think."

Then he let flow out of him the stream that always ran in his heart like sorrowful music ever since the day when first, as a page, in my Lord Shrewsbury's house in Sheffield, he had set eyes on that queen of sorrows. Then, again, upon the occasion of his journey to Paris, he had met with Mr. Morgan, her servant, and the Bishop of Glasgow, her friend, whose talk had excited and inspired him. He had learned from them something more of her glories and beauties, and remembering what he had seen of her, adored her the more. He leaned back now, shading his eyes from the candles upon the table, and began to sing his love and his queen. He told of new insults that had been put upon her, new deprivations of what was left to her of liberty; he did not speak now of Elizabeth by name, since a fountain, even of talk, should not give out at once sweet water and bitter; but he spoke of the day when Mary should come herself to the throne of England, and take

that which was already hers; when the night should roll away, and the morning-star arise; and the Faith should come again like the flowing tide, and all things be again as they had been from the beginning. It was rank treason that he talked, such as would have brought him to Tyburn if it had been spoken in London in indiscreet company; it was that treason which her Grace herself had made possible by her faithlessness to God and man; such treason as God Himself must have mercy upon, since He reads all hearts and their intentions. The others kept silence.

At the end he stood up. Then he stooped for his boots.

"I must be riding, sir," he said.

Mr. Audrey raised his hand to the latten bell that stood beside him on the table.

"I will take Anthony to his horse," said Robin suddenly, for a thought had come to him.

"Then good night, sir," said Anthony, as he drew on his second boot and stood up.

The sky was all ablaze with stars now as they came out into the court. On their right shone the high windows of the little hall where peace now reigned, except for the clatter of the boys who took away the dishes; and the night was very still about them in the grip of the frost, for the village went early to bed, and even the dogs were asleep.

Robin said nothing as they went over the paving, for his determination was not yet ripe, and Anthony was still aglow with his own talk. Then, as the servant who waited for his master, with the horses, showed himself

in the stable-arch with a lantern, Robin's mind was made up.

"I have something to tell you," he said softly. "Tell your man to wait."

"Eh?"

"Tell your man to wait with the horses."

His heart beat hot and thick in his throat as he led the way through the screens and out beyond the hall and down the steps again into the pleasaunce. Anthony took him by the sleeve once or twice, but he said nothing, and went on across the grass, and out through the open iron gate that gave upon the woods. He dared not say what he had to say within the precincts of the house, for fear he should be overheard and the shame be known before its time. Then, when they had gone a little way into the wood, into the dark out of the starlight, Robin turned; and, as he turned, saw the windows of the hall go black as the boys extinguished the torches.

"Well?" whispered Anthony sharply (for a fool could see that the news was to be weighty, and Anthony was no fool).

It was wonderful how Robin's thoughts had fixed themselves since his talk with Mistress Marjorie. He had gone to Padley, doubting of what he should say, doubting what she would tell him, asking himself even whether compliance might not be the just as well as the prudent way. Yet now black shame had come on him—the black shame that any who was a Catholic should turn from his faith; blacker, that he should so turn without even a touch of the rack or the threat of it; blackest of all, that it should be his own father who should do

this. It was partly food and wine that had strengthened him, partly Anthony's talk just now; but the frame and substance of it all was Marjorie and her manner of speaking, and her faith in him and in God.

He stood still, silent, breathing so heavily that Anthony heard him.

"Tell me, Rob; tell me quickly."

Robin drew a long breath.

"You saw that my father was silent?" he said.

"Yes."

"Stay. . . . Will you swear to me by the mass that you will tell no one what you will hear from me till you hear it from others?"

"I will swear it," whispered Anthony in the darkness.

Again Robin sighed in a long, shuddering breath. Anthony could hear him tremble with cold and pain.

"Well," he said, "my father will leave the Church next Easter. He is tired of paying fines, he says. And he has bidden me to come with him to Matstead Church."

There was dead silence.

"I went to tell Marjorie to-day," whispered Robin. "She has promised to be my wife some day; so I told her, but no one else. She has bidden me to leave Matstead for Easter, and pray to God to show me what to do afterwards. Can you help me, Anthony?"

He was seized suddenly by the arms.

"Robin . . . No . . . no! It is not possible!"

"It is certain. I have never known my father turn from his word."

From far away in the wild woods came a cry as the

Come Rack! Come Rope! I.

3

two stood there. It might be a wolf or fox, if any were there, or some strange night-bird, or a woman in pain. It rose, it seemed, to a scream, melancholy and dreadful, and then died again. The two heard it, but said nothing, one to the other. No doubt it was some beast in a snare or a-hunting, but it chimed in with the desolation of their hearts so as to seem but a part of it. So the two stood in silence. The house was quiet now, and most of those within it upon their beds. Only, as the two knew, there still sat in silence within the little wainscoted parlour, with his head on his hand and a glass of muscaded beside him—he of whom they thought—the father of one and the friend and host of the other. . . . It was not until this instant in the dark and in the quiet, with the other lad's hands still gripped on to his arms, that this boy understood the utter shame and the black misery of that which he had said, and the other heard.

CHAPTER II.

I.

THERE were excuses in plenty for Robin to ride abroad, to the north towards Hathersage or to the south towards Dethick, as the whim took him; for he was learning to manage the estate that should be his one day. At one time it was to quiet a yeoman whose domain had been ridden over and his sown fields destroyed; at another, to dispute with a miller who claimed for injury through floods for which he held his lord responsible; at a third, to see to the woodland or the fences broken by the deer. He came and went then as he willed; and on the second day, after Anthony's visit, set out before dinner to meet him, that they might speak at length of what lay now upon both their hearts.

To his father he had said no more, nor he to him. His father sat quiet in the parlour, or was in his own chamber when Robin was at home; but the lad understood very well that there was no thought of yielding. And there were a dozen things on which he himself must come to a decision. There was the first, the question as to where he was to go for Easter, and how he was to tell his father; what to do if his father forbade him outright; whether or no the priests of the district

should be told; what to do with the chapel furniture that was kept in a secret place in a loft at Matstead. Above all, there hung over him the thought of what would come after, if his father held to his decision and would allow him neither to keep his religion at home nor go elsewhere.

On the second day, therefore, he rode out (the frost still holding, though the sun was clear and warm), and turned southwards through the village for the Dethick road, towards the place in which he had appointed to meet Anthony. At the entrance to the village he passed the minister, Mr. Barton, coming out of his house, that had been the priest's lodging, a middle-aged man, made a minister under the new Prayer-book, and, therefore, no priest as were some of the ministers about, who had been made priests under Mary. He was a solid man, of no great wit or learning, but there was not an ounce of harm in him. (They were fortunate, indeed, to have such a minister; since many parishes had but laymen to read the services; and in one, not twenty miles away, the squire's falconer held the living.) Mr. Barton was in his sad-coloured cloak and round cap, and saluted Robin heartily in his loud, bellowing voice.

"Riding abroad again," he cried, "on some secret errand!"

"I will give your respects to Mr. Babington," said Robin, smiling heavily. "I am to meet him about a matter of a tithe too!"

"Ah! you Papists would starve us altogether if you could," roared the minister, who wished no better than to be at peace with his neighbours, and was all for liberty.

"You will get your tithe safe enough—one of you, at least," said Robin. "It is but a matter as to who shall pay it."

He waved good day to the minister and set his horse to the Dethick track.

There was no going fast to-day along this country road. The frosts and the thaws had made of it a very way of sorrows. Here in the harder parts was a tumble of ridges and holes, with edges as hard as steel; here in the softer, the faggots laid to build it up were broken or rotted through, making it no better than a trap for horses' feet; and it was a full hour before Robin finished his four miles and turned up through the winter woodland to the yeoman's farm where he was to meet Anthony. It was true, as he had said to Mr. Barton, that they were to speak of a matter of tithe—this was to be their excuse if his father questioned him—for there was a doubt as to in which parish stood this farm, for the yeoman tilled three meadows that were in the Babington estate and two in Matstead.

As he came up the broken ground onto the crest of the hill, he saw Anthony come out of the yard-gate and the yeoman with him. Then Anthony mounted his horse and rode down towards him, bidding the man stay, over his shoulder.

"It is all plain enough," shouted Anthony loud enough for the man to hear. "It is Dethick that must pay. You need not come up, Robin; we must do the paying."

Robin checked his mare and waited till the other came near enough to speak.

"Young Thomas FitzHerbert is within. He is riding round his new estates," said the other beneath his breath. "I thought I would come out and tell you; and I do not know where we can talk or dine. I met him on the road, and he would come with me. He is eating his dinner there."

"But I must eat my dinner too," said Robin, in dismay.

"Will you tell him of what you have told me? He is safe and discreet, I think."

"Why, yes, if you think so," said Robin. "I do not know him very well."

"Oh! he is safe enough, and he has learned not to talk. Besides, all the country will know it by Easter."

So they turned their horses back again and rode up to the farm.

It was a great day for a yeoman when three gentlemen should take their dinners in his house; and the place was in a respectful uproar. From the kitchen vent went up a pillar of smoke, and through its door, in and out continually, fled maids with dishes. The yeoman himself, John Merton, a dried-looking, lean man, stood cap in hand to meet the gentlemen; and his wife, crimson-faced from the fire, peeped and smiled from the open door of the living-room that gave immediately upon the yard. For these gentlemen were from three of the principal estates here about. The Babingtons had their country-house at Dethick and their town-house in Derby; the Audreys owned a matter of fifteen hundred acres at least all about Matstead; and the FitzHerberts, it was said, scarcely knew themselves all that they owned,

or rather all that had been theirs until the Queen's grace had begun to strip them of it little by little on account of their faith. The two Padleys, at least, were theirs, besides their principal house at Norbury; and now that Sir Thomas was in the Fleet-prison for his religion, young Mr. Thomas, his heir, was of more account than ever.

He was at his dinner when the two came in, and he rose and saluted them. He was a smallish kind of man, with a little brown beard, and his short hair, when he lifted his flapped cap to them, showed upright on his head; he smiled pleasantly enough, and made space for them to sit down, one at each side.

"We shall do very well now, Mrs. Merton," he said, "if you will bring in that goose once more for these gentlemen."

Then he made excuses for beginning his dinner before them: he was on his way home and must be off again presently.

It was a well-furnished table for a yeoman's house. There was a linen napkin for each guest, one corner of which he tucked into his throat, while the other corner lay beneath his wooden plate. The twelve silver spoons were laid out on the smooth elm-table, and a silver salt stood before Mr. Thomas. There was, of course, an abundance to eat and drink, even though no more than two had been expected; and John Merton himself stood hatless on the further side of the table and took the dishes from the bare-armed maids to place them before the gentlemen. There was a jack of metheglin for each to drink, and a huge loaf of miscelin (or bread made of mingled corn) stood in the midst and beyond the salt.

They talked of this and of that and of the other, freely and easily—of Mr. Thomas' marriage with Mistress Westley that was to take place presently; of the new entailment of the estates made upon him by his uncle. John Merton enquired, as was right, after Sir Thomas, and openly shook his head when he heard of his sufferings (for he and his wife were as good Catholics as any in the county); and when the room was empty for a moment of the maids, spoke of a priest who, he had been told, would say mass in Tansley next day (for it was in this way, for the most part, that such news was carried from mouth to mouth). Then, when the maids came in again, the battle of the tithe was fought once more, and Mr. Thomas pronounced sentence for the second time.

They blessed themselves, all four of them, openly at the end, and went out at last to their horses.

"Will you ride with us, sir?" asked Anthony; "we can go your way. Robin here has something to say to you."

"I shall be happy if you will give me your company for a little. I must be at Padley before dark, if I can, and must visit a couple of houses on the way."

He called out to his two servants, who ran out from the kitchen wiping their mouths, telling them to follow at once, and the three rode off down the hill.

Then Robin told him.

He was silent for awhile after he had put a question or two, biting his lower lip a little, and putting his little beard into his mouth. Then he burst out.

"And I dare not ask you to come to me for Easter," he said. "God only knows where I shall be at Easter.

I shall be married, too, by then. My father is in London now and may send for me. My uncle is in the Fleet. I am here now only to see what money I can raise for the fines and for the solace of my uncle. I cannot ask you, Mr. Audrey, though God knows that I would do anything that I could. Have you nowhere to go? Will your father hold to what he says?"

Robin told him yes; and he added that there were four or five places he could go to. He was not asking for help or harbourage, but advice only.

"And even of that I have none," cried Mr. Thomas. "I need all that I can get myself. I am distracted, Mr. Babington, with all these troubles."

Robin asked him whether the priests who came and went should be told of the blow that impended; for at those times every apostacy was of importance to priests who had to run here and there for shelter.

"I will tell one or two of the more discreet ones myself," said Mr. Thomas, "if you will give me leave. I would that they were all discreet, but they are not. We will name no names, if you please; but some of them are unreasonable altogether and think nothing of bringing us all into peril."

He began to bite his beard again.

"Do you think the Commissioners will visit us again?" asked Anthony. "Mr. Fenton was telling me——"

"It is Mr. Fenton and the like that will bring them down on us if any will," burst out Mr. FitzHerbert peevishly. "I am as good a Catholic, I hope, as any in the world; but we can surely live without the sacraments for a month or two sometimes! But it is this

perpetual coming and going of priests that enrages her Grace and her counsellors. I do not believe her Grace has any great enmity against us; but she soon will, if men like Mr. Fenton and Mr. Bassett are for ever harbouring priests and encouraging them. It is the same in London, I hear; it is the same in Lancashire; it is the same everywhere. And all the world knows it, and thinks that we do condemn her Grace by such boldness. All the mischief came in with that old Bull, *Regnans in Excelsis*, in '69, and——"

"I beg your pardon, sir," came in a quiet voice from beyond him; and Robin, looking across, saw Anthony with a face as if frozen.

"Pooh! pooh!" burst out Mr. Thomas, with an uneasy air. "The Holy Father, I take it, may make mistakes, as I understand it, in such matters, as well as any man. Why, a dozen priests have said to me they thought it inopportune; and——"

"I do not permit," said Anthony with an air of dignity beyond his years, "that any man should speak so in my company."

"Well, well; you are too hot altogether, Mr. Babington. I admire such zeal indeed, as I do in the saints; but we are not bound to imitate all that we admire. Say no more, sir; and I will say no more either."

They rode in silence.

It was, indeed, one of those matters that were in dispute at that time amongst the Catholics. The Pope was not swift enough for some, and too swift for others. He had thundered too soon, said one party, if, indeed, it was right to thunder at all, and not to wait in pa-

tience till the Queen's Grace should repent herself; and he had thundered not soon enough, said the other. Whence it may at least be argued that he had been exactly opportune. Yet it could not be denied that since the day when he had declared Elizabeth cut off from the unity of the Church and her subjects absolved from their allegiance—though never, as some pretended then and have pretended ever since, that a private person might kill her and do no wrong—ever since that day her bitterness had increased yearly against her Catholic people, who desired no better than to serve both her and their God, if she would but permit that to be possible.

II.

It would be an hour later that they bade good-bye to Mr. Thomas FitzHerbert, high among the hills to the east of the Derwent river; and when they had seen him ride off towards Wingerworth, rode yet a few furlongs together to speak of what had been said.

"He can do nothing, then," said Robin; "not even to give good counsel."

"I have never heard him speak so before," cried Anthony; "he must be near mad, I think. It must be his marriage, I suppose."

"He is full of his own troubles; that is plain enough, without seeking others. Well, I must bear mine as best I can."

They were just parting—Anthony to ride back to Dethick, and Robin over the moors to Matstead, when over a rise in the ground they saw the heads of three horsemen approaching. It was a wild country that

they were in; there were no houses in sight; and in such circumstances it was but prudent to remain together until the character of the travellers should be plain; so the two, after a word, rode gently forward, hearing the voices of the three talking to one another, in the still air, though without catching a word. For, as they came nearer the voices ceased, as if the talkers feared to be overheard.

They were well mounted, these three, on horses known as Scottish nags, square-built, sturdy beasts, that could cover forty miles in the day. They were splashed, too, not the horses only, but the riders, also, as if they had ridden far, through streams or boggy ground. The men were dressed soberly and well, like poor gentlemen or prosperous yeomen; all three were bearded, and all carried arms as could be seen from the flash of the sun on their hilts. It was plain, too, that they were not rogues or cutters, since each carried his valise on his saddle, as well as from their appearance. Our gentlemen, then, after passing them with a salute and a good day, were once more about to say good-bye one to the other, and appoint a time and place to meet again for the hunting of which Robin had spoken to Marjorie, and, indeed, had drawn rein—when one of the three strangers was seen to turn his horse and come riding back after them, while his friends waited.

The two lads wheeled about to meet him, as was but prudent; but while he was yet twenty yards away he lifted his hat. He seemed about thirty years old; he had a pleasant, ruddy face.

"Mr Babington, I think, sir," he said.

"That is my name," said Anthony.

"I have heard mass in your house, sir," said the stranger. "My name is Garlick."

"Why, yes, sir, I remember—from Tideswell. How do you do, Mr. Garlick? This is Mr. Audrey, of Matstead."

They saluted one another gravely.

"Mr. Audrey is a Catholic, too, I think?"

Robin answered that he was.

"Then I have news for you, gentlemen. A priest, Mr. Simpson, is with us; and will say mass at Tansley next Sunday. You would like to speak with his reverence?"

"It will give us great pleasure, sir," said Anthony, touching his horse with his heel.

"I am bringing Mr. Simpson on his way. He is just fresh from Rheims. And Mr. Ludlam is to carry him farther on Monday," continued Mr. Garlick as they went forward.

"Mr. Ludlam?"

"He is a native of Radbourne, and has but just finished at Oxford. . . . Forgive me, sir; I will but just ride forward and tell them."

The two lads drew rein, seeing that he wished first to tell the others who they were, before bringing them up; and a strange little thing fell as Mr. Garlick joined the two. For it happened that by now the sun was at his setting; going down in a glory of crimson over the edge of the high moor; and that the three riders were directly in his path from where the two lads waited. Robin, therefore, looking at them, saw the three all together on their horses with the circle of the sun about them, and a great flood of blood-coloured light on every

side; the priest was in the midst of the three, and the two men leaning towards him seemed to be speaking and as if encouraging him strongly. For an instant, so strange was the light, so immense the shadows on this side spread over the tumbled ground up to the lads themselves, so vast the great vault of illuminated sky, that it seemed to Robin as if he saw a vision. . . . Then the strangeness passed, as Mr. Garlick turned away again to beckon to them; and the boy thought no more of it at that time.

They uncovered as they rode towards the priest, and bowed low to him as he lifted his hand with a few words of Latin; and the next instant they were in talk.

Mr. Simpson, like his friends, was a youngish man at this time, with a kind face and great, innocent eyes that seemed to wonder and question. Mr. Ludlam, too, was under thirty years old, plainly not of gentleman's birth, though he was courteous and well-mannered. It seemed a great matter to these three to have fallen in with young Mr. Babington, whose family was so well-known, and whose own fame as a scholar as well as an ardent Catholic, was all over the county.

Robin said little; he was overshadowed by his friend; but he listened and watched as the four spoke together, and learned that Mr. Simpson had been made priest scarcely a month before, and was come from Yorkshire, which was his own county, to minister in the district of the Peak at least for awhile. He heard, too, news from Douai, and that the college, it was thought, might move from there to another place under the protection of the family of De Guise, since her Grace

was very hot against Douai, whence so many of her troubles proceeded, and was doing her best to persuade the Governor of the Netherlands to suppress it. However, said Mr. Simpson, it was not yet done.

Anthony, too, in his turn gave the news of the county; he spoke of Mr. Fenton, of the FitzHerberts and others that were safe and discreet persons; but he said nothing at that time of Mr. Audrey of Matstead, at which Robin was glad, since his shame deepened on him every hour, and all the more now that he had met with those three men who rode so gallantly through the country in peril of liberty or life itself. Nor did he say anything of the FitzHerberts except that they might be relied upon.

"We must be riding," said Garlick at last; "these moors are strange to me; and it will be dark in half an hour."

"Will you allow me to be your guide, sir?" asked Anthony of the priest. "It is all in my road, and you will not be troubled with questions or answers if you are in my company."

"But what of your friend, sir?"

"Oh! Robin knows the country as he knows the flat of his hand. We were about to separate as we met you."

"Then we will thankfully accept your guidance, sir," said the priest gravely.

An impulse seized upon Robin as he was about to say good day, though he was ashamed of it five minutes later as a modest lad would be. Yet he followed it now; he leapt off his horse and, holding Cecily's rein in his arm, kneeled on the stones with both knees.

"Your blessing, sir," he said to the priest. And Anthony eyed him with astonishment.

III.

Robin was moved, as he rode home over the high moors, and down at last upon the woods of Mâtstead, in a manner that was new to him, and that he could not altogether understand. He had met travelling priests before; indeed, all the priests whose masses he had ever heard, or from whom he had received the sacraments, were travelling priests who went in peril; and yet this young man, upon whose consecrated hands the oil was scarcely yet dry, moved and drew his heart in a manner that he had never yet known. It was perhaps something in the priest's face that had so affected him; for there was a look in it of a kind of surprised timidity and gentleness, as if he wondered at himself for being so foolhardy, and as if he appealed with that same wonder and surprise to all who looked on him. His voice, too, was gentle, as if tamed for the seminary and the altar; and his whole air and manner wholly unlike that of some of the priests whom Robin knew—loud-voiced, confident, burly men whom you would have sworn to be country gentlemen or yeomen living on their estates or farms and fearing to look no man in the face. It was this latter kind, thought Robin, that was best suited to such a life—to riding all day through north-country storms, to lodging hardily where they best could, to living such a desperate enterprise as a priest's life then was, with prices upon their heads and spies everywhere. It was not a life for quiet persons like

Mr. Simpson who, surely, would be better at his books in some college abroad, offering the Holy Sacrifice in peace and security, and praying for adventurers more hardy than himself. Yet here was Mr. Simpson just set out upon such an adventure, of his own free-will and choice, with no compulsion save that of God's Grace.

There was yet more than an hour before supper-time when he rode into the court at last; and Dick Sampson, his own groom, came to take his horse from him.

"The master's not been from home to-day, sir," said Dick when Robin asked of his father.

"Not been from home?"

"No, sir—not out of the house, except that he was walking in the pleasure half an hour ago."

Robin ran up the steps and through the screens to see if his father was still there; but the little walled garden, so far as he could see it in the light from the hall windows, was empty; and, indeed, it would be strange for any man to walk in such a place at such an hour. He wondered, too, to hear that his father had not been from home; for on all days, except he were ill, he would be about the estate, here and there. As he came back to the screens he heard a step going up and down in the hall, and on looking in met his father face to face. The old man had his hat on his head, but no cloak on his shoulders, though even with the fire the place was cold. It was plain that he had been walking up and down to warm himself. Robin could not make out his face very well, as he stood with his back to a torch.

"Where have you been, my lad?"

"I went to meet Anthony at one of the Dethick farms, sir—John Merton's."

"You met no one else?"

"Yes, sir; Mr. Thomas Fitz Herbert was there and dined with us. He rode with us, too, a little way." And then, as he was on the point of speaking of the priest, he stopped himself; and, in an instant knew that never again must he speak of a priest to his father; his father had already lost his right to that. His father looked at him a moment, standing with his hands clasped behind his back.

"Have you heard anything of a priest that is newly come to these parts—or coming?"

"Yes, sir. I hear mass is to be said . . . in the district, on Sunday."

"Where is mass to be said?"

Robin drew a long breath, lifted his eyes to his father's and then dropped them again.

"Did you hear me, sir? Where is mass to be said?"

Again Robin lifted and again dropped his eyes.

"What is the priest's name?"

Again there was dead silence. For a son, in those days, so to behave towards his father, was an act of very defiance. Yet the father said nothing. There the two remained; Robin with his eyes on the ground, expecting a storm of words or a blow in the face. Yet he knew he could do no otherwise; the moment had come at last and he must act as he would be obliged always to act hereafter.

Matters had matured swiftly in the boy's mind, all

unconsciously to himself. Perhaps it was the timid air of the priest he had met an hour ago that consummated the process. At least it was so consummated.

Then his father turned suddenly on his heel; and the son went out trembling.

CHAPTER III.

I.

"I WILL speak to you to-night, sir, after supper," said his father sharply a second day later, when Robin, meeting his father setting out before dinner, had asked him to give him an hour's talk.

Robin's mind had worked fiercely and intently since the encounter in the hall. His father had sat silent both at supper and afterwards, and the next day was the same; the old man spoke no more than was necessary, shortly and abruptly, scarcely looking his son once in the face, and the rest of the day they had not met. It was plain to the boy that something must follow his defiance, and he had prepared all his fortitude to meet it. Yet the second night had passed and no word had been spoken, and by the second morning Robin could bear it no longer; he must know what was in his father's mind. And now the appointment was made, and he would soon know all. His father was absent from dinner, and the boy dined alone. He learned from Dick Sampson that his father had ridden southwards.

It was not until Robin had sat down nearly half an

hour later than supper-time that the old man came in. The frost was gone; deep mud had succeeded, and the rider was splashed above his thighs. He stayed at the fire for his boots to be drawn off and to put on his soft-leather shoes, while Robin stood up dutifully to await him. Then he came forward, took his seat without a word, and called for supper. In ominous silence the meal proceeded, and with the same thunderous air, when it was over, his father said grace and made his way, followed by his son, into the parlour behind. He made no motion at first to pour out his wine; then he helped himself twice and left the jug for Robin.

Then suddenly he began without moving his head.

"I wish to know your intentions," he said, with irony so serious that it seemed gravity. "I cannot flog you or put you to school again, and I must know how we stand to one another."

Robin was silent. He had looked at his father once or twice, but now sat downcast and humble in his place. With his left hand he fumbled, out of sight, Mr. Maine's pair of beads. His father, for his part, sat with his feet stretched to the fire, his head propped on his hand, not doing enough courtesy to his son even to look at him.

"Do you hear me, sir?"

"Yes, sir. But I do not know what to say."

"I wish to know your intentions. Do you mean to thwart and disobey me in all matters, or in only those that have to do with religion?"

"I do not wish to thwart or disobey you, sir, in any matters except where my conscience is touched." (The

substance of this answer had been previously rehearsed, and the latter part of it even verbally.)

"Be good enough to tell me what you mean by that."

Robin licked his lips carefully and sat up a little in his chair.

"You told me, sir, that it was your intention to leave the Church. Then how can I tell you of what priests are here, or where mass is to be said. You would not have done so to one who was not a Catholic, six months ago."

The man sneered visibly.

"There is no need," he said. "It is Mr. Simpson who is to say mass to-morrow, and it is at Tansley that it will be said, at six o'clock in the morning. If I choose to tell the justices, you cannot prevent it." (He turned round in a flare of anger.) "Do you think I shall tell the justices?"

Robin said nothing.

"Do you think I shall tell the justices?" roared the old man insistently.

"No, sir. Now I do not."

The other growled gently and sank back.

"But if you think that I will permit my son to flout me to my face in my own hall, and not to trust his own father—why, you are immeasurably mistaken, sir. So I ask you again how far you intend to thwart and disobey me."

A kind of despair surged up in the boy's heart—despair at the fruitlessness of this ironical and furious sort of talk; and with the despair came boldness.

"Father, will you let me speak outright, without

thinking that I mean to insult you? I do not; I swear I do not. Will you let me speak, sir?"

His father growled again a sort of acquiescence, and Robin gathered his forces. He had prepared a kind of defence that seemed to him reasonable, and he knew that his father was at least just. They had been friends, these two, always, in an underground sort of way, which was all that the relations of father and son in such days allowed. The old man was curt, obstinate, and even boisterous in his anger; but there was a kindliness beneath that the boy always perceived—a kindliness which permitted the son an exceptional freedom of speech, which he used always in the last resort and which he knew his father loved to hear him use. This, then, was plainly a legitimate occasion for it, and he had prepared himself to make the most of it. He began formally:

"Sir," he said, "you have brought me up in the Old Faith, sent me to mass, and to the priest to learn my duty, and I have obeyed you always. You have taught me that a man's duty to God must come before all else—as our Saviour Himself said, too. And now you turn on me, and bid me forget all that, and come to church with you. . . . It is not for me to say anything to my father about his own conscience; I must leave that alone. But I am bound to speak of mine when occasion rises, and this is one of them. . . . I should be dishonouring and insulting you, sir, if I did not believe you when you said you would turn Protestant; and a man who says he will turn Protestant has done so already. It was for this reason, then, and no other, that I did not answer you the other day; not because I wish to be disobedient

to you, but because I must be obedient to God. I did not lie to you, as I might have done, and say that I did not know who the priest was nor where mass was to be said. But I would not answer, because it is not right or discreet for a Catholic to speak of these things to those who are not Catholics——”

“How dare you say I am not a Catholic, sir!”

“A Catholic, sir, to my mind,” said Robin steadily, “is one who holds to the Catholic Church and to no other. I mean nothing offensive, sir; I mean what I said I meant, and no more. It is not for me to condemn——”

“I should think not!” snorted the old man.

“Well, sir, that is my reason. And further——”

He stopped, doubtful.

“Well, sir—what further?”

“Well, I cannot come to the church with you at Easter.”

His father wheeled round savagely in his chair.

“Father, hear me out, and then say what you will. . . . I say I cannot come with you to church at Easter, because I am a Catholic. But I do not wish to trouble or disobey you openly. I will go away from home for that time. Good Mr. Barton will cause no trouble; he wants nothing but peace. Father, you are not just to me. You have taught me too much, or you have not given me time enough——”

Again he broke off, knowing that he had said what he did not mean, but the old man was on him like a hawk.

“Not time enough, you say? Well, then——”

“No, sir; I did not mean that,” wailed Robin sud-

denly. "I do not mean that I should change if I had a hundred years; I am sure I shall not. But——"

"You said, 'Not time enough,'" said the other meditatively. "Perhaps if I give you time——"

"Father, I beg of you to forget what I said; I did not mean to say it. It is not true. But Marjorie said——"

"Marjorie! What has Marjorie to do with it?"

Robin found himself suddenly in deep waters. He had plunged and found that he could not swim. This was the second mistake he had made in saying what he did not mean. . . . Again the courage of despair came to him, and he struck out further.

"I must tell you of that too, sir," he said. "Mistress Marjorie and I——"

He stopped, overwhelmed with shame. His father turned full round and stared at him.

"Go on, sir."

Robin seized his glass and emptied it.

"Well, sir. Mistress Marjorie and I love one another. We are but boy and girl, sir; we know that——"

Then his father laughed. It was laughter that was at once hearty and bitter; and, with it, came the closing of the open door in the boy's heart. As there came out, after it, sentence after sentence of scorn and contempt, the bolts, so to say, were shot and the key turned. It might all have been otherwise if the elder man had been kind, or if he had been sad or disappointed, or even if he had been merely angry; but the soreness and misery in the old man's heart—misery at his own acts and words, and at the outrage he was doing to his own conscience—turned his judgment bitter, and with that bitterness his son's heart shut tight against him.

"But boy and girl!" sneered the man. "A couple of blind puppies, I would say rather—you with your falcons and mare and your other toys, and the down on your chin, and your conscience; and she with her white face and her mother and her linen-parlour and her beads"—(his charity prevailed so far as to hinder him from more outspoken contempt)—"And you two babes have been prattling of conscience and prayers together—I make no doubt, and thinking yourselves Cecilies and Laurences and all the holy martyrs—and all this without a by-your-leave, I dare wager, from parent or father, and thinking yourselves man and wife; and you fondling her, and she too modest to be fondled, and——"

The plain truth struck him sudden splendour, at least sufficiently strong to furnish him with a question.

"And have you told Mistress Marjorie about your sad rogue of a father?"

Robin, white with anger, held his lips grimly together, and the wrath blazed in an instant up from the scornful old heart, whose very love was turned to gall.

"Tell me, sir—I will have it!" he cried.

Robin looked at him with such hard fury in his eyes that for a moment the man winced. Then he recovered himself, and again his anger rose to the brim.

"You need not look at me like that, you hound. Tell me, I say!"

"I will not!" shouted Robin, springing to his feet.

The old man was up too by now, with all the anger of his son hardened by his dignity.

"You will not?"

"No."

For a moment the fate of them both still hung in

the balance. If, even at this instant, the father had remembered his love rather than his dignity, had thought of the past and its happy years, rather than of the blinding, swollen present; or, on the other side, if the son had but submitted if only for an hour, and obeyed in order that he might rule later—the whole course might have run aright, and no hearts have been broken and no blood shed. But neither would yield. There was the fierce northern obstinacy in them both; the gentle birth sharpened its edge; the defiant refusal of the son, the wounding contempt of the father not for his son only, but for his son's love—these things inflamed the hearts of both to madness. The father seized his ultimate right, and struck his son across the face.

Then the son answered by his only weapon.

For a sensible pause he stood there, his fresh face paled to chalkiness, except where the print of five fingers slowly reddened. Then he made a courteous little gesture, as if to invite his father to sit down; and as the other did so, slowly and shaking all over, struck at him by careful and calculated words, delivered with a stilted and pompous air:

"You have beaten me, sir; so, of course, I obey. Yes, I told Mistress Marjorie Manners that my father no longer counted himself a Catholic, and would publicly turn Protestant at Easter, so as to please her Grace and be in favour with the Court and with the county justices. And I have told Mr. Babington so as well, and also Mr. Thomas FitzHerbert. It will spare you the pain, sir, of making any public announcement on the matter. It is always a son's duty to spare his father pain."

Then he bowed, wheeled, and went out of the room.

II.

Two hours later Robin was still lying completely dressed on his bed in the dark.

It was a plain little chamber where he lay, fireless, yet not too cold, since it was wainscoted from floor to ceiling, and looked out eastwards upon the pleasaunce, with rooms on either side of it. A couple of presses sunk in the walls held his clothes and boots; a rush-bottomed chair stood by the bed; and the bed itself, laid immediately on the ground, was such as was used in most good houses by all except the master and mistress, or any sick members of the family—a straw mattress and a wooden pillow. His bows and arrows, with a pair of dags or pistols, hung on a rack against the wall at the foot of his bed, and a little brass cross engraved with a figure of the Crucified hung over it. It was such a chamber as any son of a house might have, who was a gentleman and not luxurious.

A hundred thoughts had gone through his mind since he had flung himself down here, shaking with passion; and these had begun already to repeat themselves, like a turning wheel, in his head. Marjorie; his love for her; his despair of that love; his father; all that they had been, one to the other, in the past; the little, or worse than little, that they would be, one to the other, in the future; the priest's face as he had seen it three days ago; what would be done at Easter, what later—all these things, coloured and embittered now by his

own sorrow for his words to his father, and the knowledge that he had shamed himself when he should have suffered in silence—these things turned continually in his head, and he was too young and too simple to extricate one from the other all at once.

Things had come about in a manner which yesterday he would not have thought possible. He had never before spoken so to one to whom he owed reverence; neither had this one ever treated him so. His father had stood always to him for uprightness and justice; he had no more questioned these virtues in his father than in God. Words or acts of either might be strange or incomprehensible, yet the virtues themselves remained always beyond a doubt; and now, with the opening of the door which his father's first decision had accomplished, a crowd of questions and judgments had rushed in, and a pillar of earth and heaven was shaken at last. . . . It is a dreadful day when for the first time to a young man or maiden, any shadow of God, however unworthy, begins to tremble.

He understood presently, however, what an elder man, or a less childish, would have understood at once—that these things must be dealt with one by one, and that that which lay nearest to his hand was his own fault. Even then he fought with his conscience; he told himself that no lad of spirit could tolerate such insults against his love, to say nothing of the injustice against himself that had gone before; but, being honest, he presently enquired of what spirit such a lad would be—not of that spirit which Marjorie would approve, nor the gentle-eyed priest he had spoken with. . . .

Well, the event was certain with such as Robin, and he was presently standing at the door of his room, his boots drawn off and laid aside, listening, with a heart beating in his ears to hinder him, for any sound from beneath. He did not know whether his father were abed or not. If not, he must ask his pardon at once.

He went downstairs at last, softly, to the parlour, and peeped in. All was dark, except for the glimmer from the stove, and his heart felt lightened. Then, as he was cold with his long vigil outside his bed, he stirred the embers into a blaze and stood warming himself.

How strange and passionless, he thought, looked this room, after the tempest that had raged in it just now. The two glasses stood there—his own not quite empty—and the jug between them. His father's chair was drawn to the table, as if he were still sitting in it; his own was flung back as he had pushed it from him in his passion. There was an old print over the stove at which he looked presently—it had been his mother's, and he remembered it as long as his life had been—it was of Christ carrying His cross.

His shame began to increase on him. How wickedly he had answered, with every word a wound! He knew that the most poisonous of them all were false; he had known it even while he spoke them; it was not to curry favour with her Grace that his father had lapsed; it was that his temper was tried beyond bearing by those continual fines and rebuffs; the old man's patience was gone—that was all. And he, his son, had not said one word of comfort or strength; he had thought of himself and his own wrongs, and being reviled he had reviled again. . . .

There stood against the wall between the windows a table and an oaken desk that held the estate-bills and books; and beside the desk were laid clean sheets of paper, an ink-pot, a pounce-box, and three or four feather pens. It was here that he wrote, being newly from school, at his father's dictation, or his father sometimes wrote himself, with pain and labour, the few notices or letters that were necessary. So he went to this and sat down at it; he pondered a little; then he wrote a single line of abject regret.

"I ask your pardon and God's, sir, for the wicked words I said before I left the parlour. R." He folded this and addressed it with the proper superscription; and left it lying there.

III.

It was a strange ride that he had back from Tansley next morning after mass.

Dick Sampson had met him with the horses in the stable-court at Matstead a little after four o'clock in the morning; and together they had ridden through the pitch darkness, each carrying a lantern fastened to his stirrup. So complete was the darkness, however, and so small and confined the circle of light cast by the tossing light, that, for all they saw, they might have been riding round and round in a garden. Now trees showed grim and towering for an instant, then gone again; now their eyes were upon the track, the pools, the rugged ground, the soaked meadow-grass; half a dozen times the river glimmered on their right, turbid and forbidding. Once

there shone in the circle of light the eyes of some beast—pig or stag; seen and vanished again.

But the return journey was another matter; for they needed no lanterns, and the dawn rose steadily overhead, showing all that they passed in ghostly fashion, up to final solidity.

It resembled, in fact, the dawn of Faith in a soul.

First from the darkness outlines only emerged, vast and sinister, of such an appearance that it was impossible to tell their proportions or distances. The skyline a mile away, beyond the Derwent, might have been the edge of a bank a couple of yards off; the glimmering pool on the lower meadow path might be the lighted window of a house across the valley. There succeeded to outlines a kind of shaded tint, all worked in grey like a print, clear enough to distinguish tree from boulder and sky from water, yet not clear enough to show the texture of anything. The third stage was that in which colours began to appear, yet flat and dismal, holding, it seemed, no light, yet reflecting it; and all in an extraordinary cold clearness. Nature seemed herself, yet struck to dumbness. No breeze stirred the twigs overhead or the undergrowth through which they rode. Once, as the two, riding a little apart, turned suddenly together, up a ravine into thicker woods, they came upon a herd of deer, who stared on them without any movement that the eye could see. Here a stag stood with two hinds beside him; behind, Robin saw the backs and heads of others that lay still. Only the beasts kept their eyes upon them, as they went, watching, as if it were a picture only that went by. So, by little and little, the breeze stirred like a waking man; cocks crew from over the

hills one to the other; dogs barked far away, till the face of the world was itself again, and the smoke from Mat-stead rose above the trees in front.

Robin had ridden in the dawn an hundred times before; yet never before had he so perceived that strange deliberateness and sleep of the world; and he had ridden, too, perhaps twenty times at such an hour, with his father beside him, after mass on some such occasion. Yet it seemed to him this time that it was the mass which he had seen, and his own solitariness, that had illuminated his eyes. It was dreadful to him—and yet it threw him more than ever on himself and God—that his father would ride with him so no more. Henceforward he would go alone, or with a servant only; he would, alone, go up to the door of house or barn and rap four times with his riding-whip; alone he would pass upstairs through the darkened house to the shrouded room, garret or bedchamber, where the group was assembled, all in silence; where presently a dark figure would rise and light the pair of candles, and then, himself a ghost, rest there by their light, throwing huge shadows on wainscot and ceiling as his arms went this way and that; and then, alone of all that were of blood-relationship to him, he would witness the Holy Sacrifice. . . .

How long that would be so, he did not know. Something surely must happen that would prevent it. Or, at least, some day, he would ride so with Marjorie, whom he had seen this morning across the dusky candle-lit gloom, praying in a corner; or, maybe, with her would entertain the priest, and open the door to the worshippers who streamed in, like bees to a flower-garden, from farm and manor and village. He could not for

ever ride alone from Matstead and meet his father's silence.

One thing more, too, had moved him this morning; and that, the sight of the young priest at the altar whom he had met on the moor. Here, more than ever, was the gentle priestliness and innocence apparent. He stood there in his red vestments; he moved this way and that; he made his gestures; he spoke in undertones, lit only by the pair of wax-candles, more Levitical than ever in such a guise, yet more unsuited than ever to such exterior circumstances. Surely this man should say mass for ever; yet surely never again ride over the moors to do it, amidst enemies. He was of the strong castle and the chamber, not of the tent and the battle. . . . And yet it was of such soldiers as these, as well as of the sturdy and the strong, that Christ's army was made.

It was in broad daylight, though under a weeping sky, that Robin rode into the court at Matstead. He shook the rain from his cloak within the screens, and stamped to get the mud away; and, as he lifted his hat to shake it, his father came in from the pleasaunce.

Robin glanced up at him, swift and shy, half smiling, expecting a word or a look. His father must surely have read his little letter by now, and forgiven him. But the smile died away again, as he met the old man's eyes; they were as hard as steel; his clean-shaven lips were set like a trap, and, though he looked at his son, it seemed that he did not see him. He passed through the screens and went down the steps into the court.

The boy's heart began to beat so as near to sicken

him after his long fast and his ride. He told himself that his father could not have been into the parlour yet, though he knew, even while he thought it, that this was false comfort. He stood there an instant, waiting; hoping that even now his father would call to him; but the strong figure passed resolutely on out of sight.

Then the boy went into the hall, and swiftly through it. There on the desk in the window lay the pen he had flung down last night, but no more; the letter was gone; and, as he turned away, he saw lying among the wood-ashes of the cold stove a little crumpled ball. He stooped and drew it out. It was his letter, tossed there after the reading; his father had not taken the pains to keep it safe, nor even to destroy it.

CHAPTER IV.

I.

THE company was already assembled both within and without Padley, when Robin rode up from the river-side, on a fine, windy morning, for the sport of the day. Perhaps a dozen horses stood tethered at the entrance to the little court, with a man or two to look after them, for the greater part of their riders were already within; and a continual coming and going of lads with dogs; falconers each with his cadge, or three-sided frame on which sat the hawks; a barking of hounds, a screaming of birds, a clatter of voices and footsteps in the court—all this showed that the boy was none too early. A man stepped forward to take his mare and his hawks; and Robin slipped from his saddle and went in.

Padley Hall was just such a house as would serve a wealthy gentleman who desired a small country estate with sufficient dignity and not too many responsibilities. It stood upon the side of the hill, well set-up above the damp of the valley, yet protected from the north-easterly winds by the higher slopes, on the tops of which lay Burbage Moor, where the hawking was to be held. On the south, over the valley, stood out the modest hall and buttery (as, indeed, they stand to this day),

with a door between them, well buttressed in two places upon the falling ground, in one by a chimney, in the other by a slope of masonry; and behind these buildings stood the rest of the court, the stables, the wash-house, the bake-house and such like, below; and above the sleeping rooms for the family and the servants. On the first floor, above the buttery and the hall, were situated the ladies' parlour and chapel; for this, at least, Padley had, however little its dignity in other matters, that it retained its chapel served in these sorrowful days not, as once, by a chaplain, but by whatever travelling priest might be there.

Robin entered through the great gate on the east side—a dark entrance kept by a porter who saluted him—and rode through into the court; and here, indeed, was the company; for out of the windows of the low hall on his left came a babble of tongues, while two or three gentlemen with pots in their hands saluted him from the passage door, telling him that Mr. Thomas FitzHerbert was within. Mr. Fenton was one of these, come over from North Lees, where he had his manor, a brisk, middle-aged man, dressed soberly and well, with a pointed beard and pleasant, dancing eyes.

“And Mr. John, too, came last night,” he said; “but he will not hawk with us. He is ridden from London on private matters.”

It was an exceedingly gay sight on which Robin looked as he turned into the hall. It was a low room, ceiled in oak and wainscoted half-way up, a trifle dark, since it was lighted only by one or two little windows on either side, yet warm and hospitable looking; with a

great fire burning in a chimney on the south side, and perhaps a dozen and a half persons sitting over their food and drink, since they were dining early to-day to have the longer time for sport.

A voice hailed him as he came in; and he went up to pay his respects to Mr. John FitzHerbert, a tall man, well past middle-age, who sat with his hat on his head, at the centre of the high table, with the arms of Eyre and FitzHerbert beneath the canopy, all emblazoned, to do the honours of the day.

"You are late, sir, you are late!" he cried out genially. "We are just done."

Robin saluted him. He liked this man, though he did not know him very well; for he was continually about the country, now in London, now at Norbury, now at Swinnerton, always occupied with these endless matters of fines and recusancy.

Robin saluted him then, and said a word or two; bowed to Mr. Thomas, his son, who came up to speak with him; and then looked for Marjorie. She sat there, at the corner of the table, with Mrs. Fenton at one side, and an empty seat on the other. Robin immediately sat down in it, to eat his dinner, beginning with the "gross foods," according to the English custom. There was a piece of Christmas brawn to-day, from a pig fattened on oats and peas, and hardened by being lodged (while he lived) on a boarded floor; all this was told Robin across the table with particularity, while he ate it, and drank, according to etiquette, a cup of bastard. He attended to all this zealously, while never for an instant was he unaware of the girl.

They tricked their elders very well, these two inno-

cent ones. You would have sworn that Robin looked for another place and could not see one; you would have sworn that they were shy of one another, and spoke scarcely a dozen sentences. Yet they did very well each in the company of the other; and Robin, indeed, before he had finished his partridge, had conveyed to her that there was news that he had, and must give to her before the day was out. She looked at him with enough dismay in her face for him at least to read it; for she knew by his manner that it would not be happy news.

So, too, when the fruit was done and dinner was over (for they had no opportunity to speak at any length), again you would have sworn that the last idea in his mind, as in hers, was that he should be the one to help her to her saddle. Yet he did so; and he fetched her hawk for her, and settled her reins in her hand; and presently he on one side of her, with Mr. Fenton on the other side, were riding up through Padley chase; and the talk and the laughter went up too.

II.

Up on the high moors, in the frank-chase, here indeed was a day to make sad hearts rejoice. The air was soft, as if spring were come before his time; and in the great wind that blew continually from the south-west, bearing the high clouds swiftly against the blue, ruffling the stiff heather-twigs and bilberry beneath—here was wine enough for any mourners. Before them, as they went—two riding before, with falconers on either side a little behind and the lads with the dogs beside them, and the rest in a silent line some twenty yards to the

rear—stretched the wide, flat moor like a tumbled tablecloth, broken here and there by groups of wind-tossed beech and oak, backed by the tall limestone crags like pillar-capitals of an upper world; with here and there a little shallow quarry whence marble had been taken for Derby. But more lovely than all were the valleys, seen from here, as great troughs up whose sides trooped the leafless trees—lit by the streams that threw back the sunlit sky from their bosoms; with here a mist of smoke blown all about from a village out of sight, here the shadow of a travelling cloud that fled as swift as the wind that drove it, extinguishing the flash of water only to release it again, darkening a sweep of land only to make the sunlight that followed it the more sweet.

Yet the two saw little of this, dear and familiar as they found it; since, first they rode together, and next, as it should be with young hearts, the sport presently began and drove all else away.

The sport was done in this way:

The two that rode in front selected each from the cadge one of his own falcons (it was peregrines that were used at the beginning of the day, since they were first after partridges), and so rode, carrying his falcon on his wrist, hooded, belled, and in the leash, ready to cast off. Immediately before them went a lad with a couple of dogs to nose the game—these also in a leash until they stiffened. Then the lad released them and stepped softly back, while the riders moved on at a foot's-pace, and the spaniels behind rose on their hind legs, choked by the chain, whimpering, fifty yards in the rear. Slowly the dogs advanced, each a frozen model of craft and blood-lust, till an instant afterwards, with a

whir and a chattering like a broken clock, the covey whirled from the thick growth underfoot, and flashed away northwards; and, a moment later, up went the peregrines behind them. Then, indeed, it was *sauve qui peut*, for the ground was full of holes here and there, though there were grass-stretches as well on which all rode with loose rein, the two whose falcons were sprung always in front, according to custom, and the rest in a medley behind. Away then went the birds, pursued and pursuers, till, like a falling star the falcon stooped, and then, maybe, the other a moment later, down upon the quarry; and a minute later there was the falcon back again shivering with pride and ecstasy, or all ruffle-feathered with shame, back on his master's wrist, and another torn partridge, or maybe two, in the bottom of the lad's bag; and arguments went full pelt, and cries, and sometimes sharp words, and faults were found, and praise was given; and so, on for another pair.

It was but natural that Robin and Marjorie should compete one against the other, for they were riding together and talked together. So presently Mr. Thomas called to them, and beckoned them to their places. Robin set aside Agnes on to the cadge and chose Magdalen, and Marjorie chose Sharpie. The array was set, and all moved forward.

It was a short chase and a merry one. Two birds rose from the heather and flew screaming, skimming low, as from behind them moved on the shadows of death, still as clouds, with great noiseless sweeps of sickle-shaped wings. Behind came the gallopers: Marjorie on her black horse, Robin on Cecily, seeming to compete,

yet each content if either won, each, maybe—or at least Marjorie—desiring that the other should win. And the wind screamed past them as they went.

Then came the stoops—together as if fastened by one string—faultless and exquisite; and, as the two rode up and drew rein, there, side by side on the windy turf, two fierce statues of destiny—cruel-eyed, blood-stained on the beaks, resolute and suspicious—eyed them motionless, the claws sunk deeply through back and head—awaiting recapture.

Marjorie turned swiftly to the boy as he leaped off.

“In the chapel,” she said, “at Padley.”

Robin stared at her. Then he understood and nodded his head, as Mr. Thomas rode up, his beard all blown about by the wind, breathless but congratulatory.

III.

It fell on Robin's mind with a certain heaviness and reproach that it should have been she who should have carried in her head all day the unknown news that he was to give her, and he who should have forgotten it. He understood then a little better of all that he must be to her, since, as he turned to her (his head full of hawks, and the glory of the shouting wind, and every thought of Faith and father clean blown away) it was to her mind that the under-thought had leapt, that here was their first, and perhaps their last, chance of speaking in private.

It was indeed their last chance, for the sun already stood over Chapel-le-Frith far away to the south-west;

and they must begin their circle to return, in which the ladies should fly their merlins after larks, and there was no hope henceforth for Robin. Henceforth she rode with Mrs. Fenton and two or three more, while the gentlemen who loved sport more than courtesy, turned to the left over the broken ground to work back once more after partridges. And Robin dared no more ride with his love, for fear that his company all day with her should be marked.

It was within an hour of sunset that Robin, riding ahead, having lost a hawk and his hat, having fallen into a bog-hole, being one mask of mud from head to foot, slid from his horse into Dick's hands and demanded if the ladies were back.

"Yes, sir; they are back half an hour ago. They are in the parlour."

Robin knew better. "I shall be riding in ten minutes," he said; "give the mare a mouthful."

He limped across the court, and looking behind him to see if any saw, and finding the court at that instant empty, ran up, as well as he could, the stone staircase that rose from the outside to the chapel door. It was unlatched. He pushed it open and went in.

It was a brave thing that the FitzHerberts did in keeping such a place at all, since the greatest Protestant fool in the valley knew what the little chamber was that had the angels carved on the beam-ends, and the piscina in the south wall. Windows looked out every way; through those on the south could be seen now the darkening valley and the sunlit hills, and, yet more

necessary, the road by which any travellers from the valley must surely come. Within, too, scarcely any pains were taken to disguise the place. It was wainscoted from roof to floor—ceiled, floored and walled in oak. A great chest stood beneath the little east window of two lights, that cried "Altar" if any chest ever did so. A great press stood against the wooden screen that shut the room from the ladies' parlour next door; filled in three shelves with innocent linen, for this was the only disguise that the place stooped to put on. You could not swear that mass was said there, but you could swear that it was a place in which mass would very suitably be said. A couple of benches were against the press, and three or four chairs stood about the floor.

Robin saw her against the light as soon as he came in. She was still in her blue riding-dress, with the hood on her shoulders, and held her whip in her hand; but he could see no more of her head than the paleness of her face and the gleam on her black hair.

"Well, then?" she whispered sharply; and then: "Why, what a state you are in!"

"It's nothing," said Robin. "I rolled in a bog-hole."

She looked at him anxiously.

"You are not hurt? . . . Sit down at least."

He sat down stiffly, and she beside him, still watching to see if he were the worse for his falling. He took her hand in his.

"I am not fit to touch you," he said.

"Tell me the news; tell me quickly."

So he told her; of the wrangle in the parlour and what had passed between his father and him; of his

own bitterness; and his letter, and the way in which the old man had taken it.

"He has not spoken to me since," he said, "except in public before the servants. Both nights after supper he has sat silent and I beside him."

"And you have not spoken to him?" she asked quickly.

"I said something to him after supper on Sunday, and he made no answer. He has done all his writing himself. I think it is for him to speak now. I should only anger him more if I tried it again."

She sighed suddenly and swiftly, but said nothing. Her hand lay passive in his, but her face was turned now to the bright southerly window, and he could see her puzzled eyes and her down-turned, serious mouth. She was thinking with all her wits, and, plainly, could come to no conclusion.

She turned to him again.

"And you told him plainly that you and I . . . that you and I——"

"That you and I loved one another? I told him plainly. And it was his contempt that angered me."

She sighed again.

It was a troublesome situation in which these two children found themselves. Here was the father of one of them that knew, yet not the parents of the other, who should know first of all. Neither was there any promise of secrecy, and no hope of obtaining it. If she should not tell her parents, then if the old man told them, deception would be charged against her; and if she should tell them, perhaps he would not have done

so, and so all be brought to light too soon and without cause. And besides all this there were the other matters, heavy enough before, yet far more heavy now—matters of their hopes for the future, the complications with regard to the Religion, what Robin should do, what he should not do.

So they sat there silent, she thinking and he waiting upon her thought.

She sighed again and turned to him her troubled eyes.

"My Robin," she said, "I have been thinking so much about you, and I have feared sometimes——"

She stopped herself, and he looked for her to finish. She drew her hand away and stood up.

"Oh! it is miserable!" she cried. "And all might have been so happy."

The tears suddenly filled her eyes so that they shone like flowers in dew.

He stood up, too, and put his muddy arm about her shoulders. (She felt so slight and slender.)

"It will be happy," he said. "What have you been fearing?"

She shook her head and the tears ran down.

"I cannot tell you yet. . . . Robin, what a holy man that travelling priest must be, who said mass on Sunday."

The lad was bewildered at her swift changes of thought, for he did not yet see the chain on which they hung. He strove to follow her.

"It seemed so to me too," he said. "I think I have never seen——"

"It seemed so to you too," she cried. "Why, what do you know of him?"

He was amazed at her vehemence. She had drawn herself clear of his arm and was looking at him full in the face.

"I met him on the moor," he said. "I had some talk with him. I got his blessing."

"You got his blessing! Why, so did I, after the mass, when you were gone."

"Then that should join us more closely than ever," he said.

"In Heaven, perhaps, but on earth——" She checked herself again. "Tell me what you thought of him, Robin."

"I thought it was strange that such a man as that should live such a rough life. If he were in the seminary now, safe at Douai——"

She seemed a shade paler, but her eyes did not flicker.

"Yes," she said. "And you thought——?"

"I thought that it was not that kind of man who should fare so hardly. If it were a man like John Merton, who is accustomed to such things, or a man like me——"

Again he stopped; he did not know why. But it was as if she had cried out, though she neither spoke nor moved.

"You thought that, did you, Robin?" she said presently, never moving her eyes from his face. "I thought so, too."

"But I do not know why we are talking about Mr. Simpson," said the lad. "There are other affairs more pressing."

"I am not sure," said she.

"Marjorie, my love, what are you thinking about?"

She had turned her eyes and was looking out through.

the little window. Outside the red sunlight still lay on the crags and slopes beyond the deep valley beneath them, and her face was bright in the reflected brightness. Yet he thought he had never seen her look so serious. She turned her eyes back to him as he spoke.

"I am thinking of a great many things," she said. "I am thinking of the Faith and of sorrow and of love."

"My love, what do you mean?"

Suddenly she made a swift movement towards him and took him by the lapels. He could see her face close beneath his, yet it was in shadow again, and he could make out of it no more than the shadows of mouth and eyes.

"Robin," she said, "I cannot tell you unless God tells you Himself. I am told that I am too scrupulous sometimes. . . . I do not know what I think, nor what is right, nor what are fancies. . . . But . . . but I know that I love you with all my heart . . . and . . . and that I cannot bear——"

Then her face was on his breast in a passion of weeping, and his arms were round her, and his lips on her hair.

IV.

Dick found his master a poor travelling companion as they rode home. He made a few respectful remarks as to the sport of the day, but he was answered by a wandering eye and a complete lack of enthusiasm. Mr. Robin rode loosely and heavily. Three or four times his mare stumbled (and no wonder, after all that she had gone through), and he jerked her savagely.

Then Dick tried another tack and began to speak of the company, but with no greater success. He discoursed on the riding of Mrs. Fenton, and the peregrine of Mr. Thomas, who had distinguished herself that day, and he was met by a lack-lustre eye once more.

Finally he began to speak of the religious gossip of the countryside—how it was said that another priest, a Mr. Nelson, had been taken in London, as Mr. Maine had been in Cornwall; that, it was said again, priests would have to look to their lives in future, and not only to their liberty; how the priest, Mr. Simpson, was said to be a native of Yorkshire, and how he was ridden northwards again, still with Mr. Ludlam. And here he met with a little more encouragement. Mr. Robin asked where was Mr. Simpson gone to, and Dick told him he did not know, but that he would be back again by Easter, it was thought, or, if not, another priest would be in the district. Then he began to gossip of Mr. Ludlam; how a man had told him that his cousin's wife thought that Mr. Ludlam was to go abroad to be made priest himself, and that perhaps Mr. Garlick would go too.

"That is the kind of priest we want, sir," said Dick.

"Eh?"

"That is the kind of priest we want, sir," repeated Dick solemnly. "We should do better with natives than foreigners. We want priests who know the county and the ways of the people—and men too, I think, sir, who can ride and know something of sport, and can talk of

it. I told Mr. Simpson, sir, of the sport we were to have to-day, and he seemed to care nothing about it!"

Robin sighed aloud.

"I suppose so," he said.

"Mr. John looked well, sir," pursued Dick, and proceeded to speak at length of the FitzHerbert troubles, and the iniquities of the Queen's Grace. He was such a man as was to be found throughout all England everywhere at this time—a man whose religion was a part of his politics, and none the less genuine for that. He was a shrewd man in his way, with the simplicity which belongs to such shrewdness; he disliked the new ways which he experienced chiefly in the towns, and put them down, not wholly without justice, to the change of which religion formed an integral part; he hated the beggars and would gladly have gone to see one flogged; and he disliked the ministers and their sermons and their "propheysings" with all the healthy ardour of prejudice. Once in the year did Dick approach the sacraments, and a great business he made of it, being unusually morose before them and almost indecently boisterous after them. He was feudal to the very heart of him; and it was his feudality that made him faithful to his religion as well as to his masters, for either of which he would resolutely have died. And what in the world he would do when he discovered, at Easter, that the objects of his fidelity were to take opposite courses, Robin could not conceive.

As they rode in at last, Robin, who had fallen silent again after Dick's last piece of respectful vehemence,

suddenly beat his own leg with his whip and uttered an inaudible word. It seemed to Dick that the young master had perceived clearly that which plainly had been worrying him all the way home, and that he did not like it.

CHAPTER V.

I.

MR. MANNERS sat in his parlour ten days after the beginning of Lent, full of his Sunday dinner and of perplexing thoughts all at once. He had eaten well and heartily after his week of spare diet, and then, while in high humour with all the world, first his wife and then his daughter had laid before him such revelations that all the pleasure of digestion was gone. It was but three minutes ago that Marjorie had fled from him in a torrent of tears, for which he could not see himself responsible, since he had done nothing but make the exclamations and comments that should be expected of a father in such a case.

The following were the points for his reflection—to begin with those that touched him less closely.

First that his friend Mr. Audrey, whom he had always looked upon with reverence and a kind of terror because of his hotness in matters of politics and religion, had capitulated to the enemy and was to go to church at Easter. Mr. Manners himself had something of timidity in his nature: he was conservative certainly, and practised, when he could without bringing himself into open trouble, the old religion in which he had been

brought up. He, like the younger generation, had been educated at Derby Grammar School, and in his youth had sat with his parents in the nave of the old Cluniac church of St. James to hear mass. He had then entered his father's office in Derby, about the time that the Religious Houses had fallen, and had transferred the scene of his worship to St. Peter's. At Queen Mary's accession, he had stood, with mild but genuine enthusiasm, in his lawyer's gown, in the train of the sheriff who proclaimed her in Derby market-place; and stood in the crowd, with corresponding dismay, six years later to shout for Queen Elizabeth. Since that date, for the first eleven years he had gone, as did other Catholics, to his parish church secretly, thankful that there was no doubt as to the priesthood of his parson, to hear the English prayers; and then, to do him justice, though he heard with something resembling consternation the decision from Rome that compromise must cease and that, henceforth, all true Catholics must withdraw themselves from the national worship, he had obeyed without even a serious moment of consideration. He had always feared that it might be so, understanding that delay in the decision was only caused by the hope that even now the breach might not be final or complete; and so was better prepared for the blow when it came. Since that time he had heard mass when he could, and occasionally even harboured priests, urged thereto by his wife and daughter; and, for the rest, still went into Derby for three or four days a week to carry on his lawyer's business, with Mr. Biddell his partner, and had the reputation of a sound and careful man without bigotry or passion.

It was, then, a shock to his love of peace and serenity, to hear that yet another Catholic house had fallen, and that Mr. Audrey, one of his clients, could no longer be reckoned as one of his co-religionists.

The next point for his reflection was that Robin was refusing to follow his father's example; the third, that somebody must harbour the boy over Easter, and that, in his daughter's violently expressed opinion, and with his wife's consent, he, Thomas Manners, was the proper person to do it. Last, that it was plain that there was something between his daughter and this boy, though what that was he had been unable to understand. Marjorie had flown suddenly from the room just as he was beginning to put his questions.

It is no wonder, then, that his peace of mind was gone. Not only were large principles once more threatened—considerations of religion and loyalty, but also those small and intimate principles which, so far more than great ones, agitate the mind of the individual. He did not wish to lose a client; yet neither did he wish to be unfriendly to a young confessor for the faith. Still less did he wish to lose his daughter, above all to a young man whose prospects seemed to be vanishing. He wondered whether it would be prudent to consult Mr. Bidell on the point. . . .

He was a small and precise man in his body and face, as well as in his dress; his costume was, of course, of black; but he went so far as to wear black buckles, too, on his shoes, and a black hilt on his sword. His face was little and anxious; his eyebrows were perpetually arched, as if in appeal, and he was accustomed,

when in deep thought, to move his lips as if in a motion of tasting. So, then, he sat before his fire to-day after dinner, his elbow on the table where his few books lay, his feet crossed before him, his cup of drink untouched at his side; and meantime he tasted continually with his lips, as if better to appreciate the values and significances of the points for his consideration.

It would be about half an hour later that the door opened once more and Marjorie came in again.

She was in her fine dress to-day—fine, that is, according to the exigencies of the time and place, though sober enough if for a town-house—in a good blue silk, rather dark, with a little ruff, with lace ruffles at her wrists, and a quilted petticoat, and silver buckles. For she was a gentleman's daughter, quite clearly, and not a yeoman's, and she must dress to her station. Her face was very pale and quite steady. She stood opposite her father.

"Father," she said, "I am very sorry for having behaved like a goose. You were quite right to ask those questions, and I have come back to answer them."

He had ceased tasting as she came in. He looked at her timidly and yet with an attempt at severity. He knew what was due from him as a father. But for the present he had forgotten what questions they were; his mind had been circling so wildly.

"You are right to come back," he said; "you should not have left me so."

"I am very sorry," she said again.

"Well, then—you tell me that Mr. Robin has nowhere else to go."

She flushed a little.

"He has ten places to go to. He has plenty of friends. But none have the right that we have. He is a neighbour; it was to me, first of all, that he told the trouble."

Then he remembered.

"Sit down," he said. "I must understand much better first. I do not understand why he came to you first. Why not, if he must come to this house at all—why not to me? I like the lad; he knows that well enough."

He spoke with an admirable dignity, and began to feel more happy in consequence.

She had sat down as he told her, on the other side of the table; but he could not see her face.

"It would have been better if he had, perhaps," she said. "But——"

"Yes? What 'But' is that?"

Then she faced him, and her eyes were swimming.

"Father, he told me first because he loves me, and because I love him."

He sat up. This was speaking outright what she had only hinted at before. She must have been gathering her resolution to say this, while she had been gone. Perhaps she had been with her mother. In that case he must be cautious. . . .

"You mean——"

"I mean just what I say. We love one another, and I am willing to be his wife if he desires it—and with your permission. But——"

He waited for her to go on.

"Another 'But!'" he said presently, though with increasing mildness.

"I do not think he will desire it after awhile. And . . . and I do not know what I wish. I am torn in two."

"But you are willing?"

"I pray for it every night," she cried piteously. "And every morning I pray that it may not be so."

She was staring at him as if in agony, utterly unlike what he had looked for in her. He was completely bewildered.

"I do not understand one word——"

Then she threw herself at his knees and seized his hands; her face was all torn with pain.

"And I cannot explain one word. . . . Father, I am in misery. You must pray for me and have patience with me. . . . I must wait . . . I must wait and see what God wishes."

"Now, now . . ."

"Father, you will trust me, will you not?"

"Listen to me. You must tell me this. Do you love this boy?"

"Yes, yes."

"And you have told him so? He asked you, I mean?"

"Yes."

He put her hands firmly from his knee.

"Then you must marry him, if matters can be arranged. It is what I should wish. But I do not know——"

"Father, you do not understand—you do not understand. I tell you I am willing enough, if he wishes it . . . if he wishes it."

Again she seized his hands and held them. And again bewilderment came down on him like a cloud.

"Father! you must trust me. I am willing to do everything that I ought." (She was speaking firmly and confidently now.) "If he wishes to marry me, I will marry him. I love him dearly. . . . But you must say nothing to him, not one word. My mother agrees with this. She would have told you herself; but I said that I would—that I must be brave. . . . I must learn to be brave. . . . I can tell you no more."

He lifted her hands and stood up.

"I see that I understand nothing that you say after all," he said with a fine fatherly dignity. "I must talk with your mother."

II.

He found his wife half an hour later in the ladies' parlour, which he entered with an air as of nothing to say. With the same air of disengagement he made sure that Marjorie was nowhere in the room, and presently sat down.

Mrs. Manners was well past her prime. She was over forty years old and looked over fifty, though she retained the air of distinction which Marjorie had derived from her; but her looks belied her, and she had not one tithe of the subtlety and keenness of her daughter. She was, in fact, more suited to be wife to her husband than mother to her daughter.

"You have come about the maid," she said instantly, with disconcerting penetration and frankness. "Well, I

know no more than you. She will tell me nothing but what she has told you. She has some fiddle-faddle in her head, as maids will, but she will have her way with us, I suppose."

She drew her needle through the piece of embroidery which she permitted to herself for an hour on Sundays, knotted the thread and bit it off. Then she regarded her husband.

"I . . . I will have no fiddle-faddle in such a matter," he said courageously. "Maids did not rule their parents when I was a boy; they obeyed them or were beaten."

His wife laughed shortly; and began to thread her needle again.

He began to explain. The match was in all respects suitable. Certainly there were difficulties, springing from the very startling events at Matstead, and it well might be that a man who would do as Mr. Audrey had done (or, rather, proposed to do) might show obstinacy in other directions too. Therefore there was no hurry; the two were still very young, and it certainly would be wiser to wait for any formal betrothal until Robin's future disclosed itself. But no action of Mr. Audrey's need delay the betrothal indefinitely; if need were, he, Mr. Manners, would make proper settlements. Marjorie was an only daughter; in fact, she was in some sort an heiress. The Manor would be sufficient for them both. As to any other difficulties—any of the maidenly fiddle-faddle of which his wife had spoken—this should not stand in the way for an instant.

His wife laughed again in the same exclamatory manner, when he had done and sat stroking his knees.

"Why you understand nothing about it, Mr. Manners,"

she said. "Did the maid not tell you she would marry him, if he wished it? She told me so."

"Then what is the matter?" he asked.

"I know no more than you."

"Does he not wish it?"

"She says so."

"Then——"

"Yes, that is what I say. And yet that says nothing. There is something more."

"Ask her."

"I have asked her. She bids me wait, as she bids you. It is no good, Mr. Manners. We must wait the maid's time."

He sat, breathing audibly through his nose.

These two were devoted to their daughter in a manner hardly to be described. She was the only one left to them; for the others, of whom two had been boys, had died in infancy or childhood; and, in the event, Marjorie had absorbed the love due to them all. She was a strain higher than themselves, thought her parents, and so pride in her was added to love. The mother had made incredible sacrifices, first to have her educated by a couple of old nuns who still survived in Derby, and then to bring her out suitably at Babington House last year. The father had cordially approved, and joined in the sacrifices, which included an expenditure which he would not have thought conceivable. The result was, of course, that Marjorie, under cover of a very real dutifulness, ruled both her parents completely; her mother acknowledged the dominion, at least, to herself and her husband; her father pretended that he did not;

and on this occasion rose, perhaps, nearer to repudiating it than ever in his life. It seemed to him unbearable to be bidden by his daughter, though with the utmost courtesy and affection, to mind his own business.

So he sat and breathed audibly through his nose, and meditated rebellion.

"And is the lad to come here for Easter?" he asked at last.

"I suppose so."

"And for how long?"

"So long as the maid appoints."

He breathed louder than ever.

"And, Mr. Manners," continued his wife emphatically, "no word must be said to him on the matter. The maid is very plain as to that. . . . Oh! we must let her have her way."

"Where is she gone?"

She nodded with her head to the window. He went to it and looked out.

It was the little walled garden on which he looked, in which, if he had but known it, the lad whom he liked had kissed the maid whom he loved; and there walked the maid, at this moment with her back to him, going up the central path that was bordered with box. The January sun shone on her as she went, on her hooded head, her dark cloak and her blue dress beneath. He watched her go up, and drew back a little as she turned, so that she might not see him watching; and as she came down again he saw that she

held a string of beads in her fingers and was making her devotions. She was a good girl. . . . That, at least, was a satisfaction.

Then he turned from the window again.

"Well?" said his wife.

"I suppose it must be as she says."

III.

It was an hour before sunset when Marjorie came out again into the walled garden that had become for her now a kind of sanctuary, and in her hand she carried a letter, sealed and inscribed. On the outside the following words were written:

"To Mr. Robin Audrey. At Matstead.

"Haste, haste, haste."

Within, the sheet was covered from top to bottom with the neat convent-hand she had learnt from the nuns. The most of it does not concern us. It began with such words as you would expect from a maid to her lover; it continued to inform him that her parents were willing, and, indeed, desirous that he should come to them for Easter, and that her father would write a formal letter later to invite him; it was to be written from Derby, (this conspirator informed the other,) that it might cause less comment when Mr. Audrey saw it, and was to be expressed in terms that would satisfy him. Finally, it closed as it had begun, and was subscribed by his "loving friend, M. M." One paragraph, however, is worth attention.

"I have told my father and mother, that we love one another, my Robin; and that you have asked me to marry you, and that I have consented should you wish to do so when the time comes. They have consented most willingly; and so Jesu have you in His keeping, and guide your mind aright."

It was this paragraph that had cost her half of the hour occupied in writing; for it must be expressed just so and no otherwise; and its wording had cost her agony lest on the one side she should tell him too much, and, on the other, too little. And her agony was not yet over; for she had to face its sending, and the thought of all that it might cost her. She was to give it to one of the men who was to leave early for Derby next morning and was to deliver it at Matstead on the road; so she brought it out now to her sanctuary to spread it, like the old King of Israel, before the Lord. . . .

There was a promise of frost in the air to-night. Underfoot the moisture of the path was beginning, not yet to stiffen, but rather to withdraw itself; and there was a cold clearness in the air. Over the wall beside the house, beyond the leafless trees which barred it like prison-bars, burned the sunset, deepening and glowing redder every instant. Yet she felt nothing of the cold, for a fire was within her as she went again up and down the path on which her father had watched her walk—a fire of which as yet she could not discern the fuel. The love of Robin was there—that she knew; and the love of Christ was there—so she thought; and

yet where the divine and the human passion mingled, she could not tell; nor whether, indeed, for certain, it were the love of Christ at all, and not a vain imagination of her own as to how Christ, in this case, would be loved. Only she knew that across her love for Robin a shadow had fallen; she could scarcely tell when it had first come to her, and whence. Yet it had so come; it had deepened rapidly and strongly during the mass that Mr. Simpson had said, and, behold! in its very darkness there was light. And so it had continued till confusion had fallen on her which none but Robin could dissolve. It must be his word finally that must give her the answer to her doubts; and she must make it easy for him to give it. He must know, that is, that she loved him more passionately than ever, that her heart would break if she had not her desire; and yet that she would not hold him back if a love that was greater than hers could be for him or his for her, called him to another wedding than that of which either had yet spoken. A broken heart and God's will done would be better than that God's will should be avoided and her own satisfied.

It was this kind of considerations, therefore, that sent her swiftly to and fro, up and down the path under the darkening sky—if they can be called considerations which beat on the mind like a clamour of shouting; and, as she went, she strove to offer all to God: she entreated Him to do His will, yet not to break her heart; to break her heart, yet not Robin's; to break both her heart and Robin's, if that Will could not otherwise be served.

Her lips moved now and again as she went; but her eyes were downcast and her face untroubled. . . .

As the bell in the court rang for supper she went to the door and looked through. The man was just saddling up in the stable-door opposite.

"Jack," she called, "here is the letter. Take it safely."

Then she went in to supper.

CHAPTER VI.

I.

IT was a great day and a solemn when the squire of Matstead went to Protestant communion for the first time. It was Easter Day, too, but this was less in the consideration of the village. There was first the minister, Mr. Barton, in a condition of excited geniality from an early hour. He was observed soon after it was light, by an old man who was up betimes, hurrying up the village street in his minister's cassock and gown, presumably on his way to see that all preparations were complete for the solemnity. His wife was seen to follow him a few minutes later.

By eight o'clock the inhabitants of the village were assembled at points of vantage; some openly at their doors, others at the windows; and groups from the more distant farms, decked suitably, stood at all corners; to be greeted presently by their minister hurrying back once more from the church to bring the communion vessels and the bread and wine. The four or five soldiers of the village—a couple of billmen and pikemen and a real gunner—stood apart in an official group, but did not salute him. He did not speak of that which was in the minds of all, but he waved a hand to

this man, bade a happy Easter to another, and disappeared within his lodgings leaving a wake of excitement behind him.

By a quarter before nine the three bells had begun to jangle from the tower; and the crowd had increased largely, when Mr. Barton once more passed to the church in the spring sunshine, followed by the more devout who wished to pray, and the more timid who feared a disturbance. For sentiments were not wholly on the squire's side. There was first a number of Catholics, openly confessed or at least secretly Catholic, though these were not in full force since most were gone to Padley before dawn; and there was next a certain sentiment abroad, even amongst those who conformed, in favour of tradition. That the squire of Matstead should be a Catholic was at least as fundamental an article of faith as that the minister should be a Protestant. There was little or no hot-gospel here; men still shook their heads sympathetically over the old days and the old faith, which indeed had ceased to be the faith of all scarcely twenty years ago; and it appeared to the most of them that the proper faith of the Quality, since they had before their eyes such families as the Babingtons, the Fentons, and the FitzHerberts, was that to which their own squire was about to say good-bye. It was known, too, publicly by now, that Mr. Robin was gone away for Easter, since he would not follow his father. So the crowd waited; the dogs sunned themselves; and the gunner sat on a wall.

The bells ceased at nine o'clock, and upon the moment, a group came round the churchyard wall, down

from the field-path and the stile that led to the manor.

First, walking alone came the squire, swiftly and steadily. His face was flushed a little, but set and determined. He was in his fine clothes, ruff and all; his rapier was looped at his side, and he carried a stick. Behind him came three or four farm servants; then a yeoman and his wife; and, last, at a little distance, three or four onlookers.

There was dead silence as he came; the hum of talk died at the corners; the bells' clamour had even now ceased. It seemed as if each man waited for his neighbour to speak. There was only the sound of the squire's brisk footsteps on the few yards of cobbles that paved the walk up to the lych-gate. At the door of the church, seen beyond him, was a crowd of faces.

Then a man called something aloud from fifty yards away; but there was no voice to echo him. The folk just watched their lord go by, staring on him as on some strange sight, forgetting even to salute him. And so in silence he passed on.

II.

Within, the church murmured with low talking. Already two-thirds of it was full, and all faces turned and re-turned to the door at every footstep or sound. As the bells ceased a sigh went up, as if a giant drew breath; then, once again, the murmuring began.

The church was as most were in those days. It was but a little place, yet it had had in old days great

treasures of beauty. There had been, until some ten or twelve years ago, a carved screen that ran across the chancel arch, with the Rood upon it, and St. Mary and St. John on this side and that. The high-altar, it was remembered, had been of stone throughout, surrounded with curtains on the three sides, hanging between posts that had each a carven angel, all gilt. Now all was gone, excepting only the painted windows (since glass was costly). The chancel was as bare as a barn; beneath the whitewash, high over the place where the old canopy had hung, pale colours still glimmered through where, twelve years ago, Christ had sat crowning His Mother. The altar was gone; its holy slab served now as the pavement within the west door, where the superstitious took pains to step clear of it. The screen was gone; part lay beneath the tower; part had been burned; Christ's Cross held up the roof of the shed where the minister kept his horse; the three figures had been carted off to Derby to help swell the Protestant bon-fire. The projecting stoup to the right of the main door had been broken half off. . . . In place of these glories there stood now, in the body of the church, before the chancel-steps, a great table, such as the rubrics of the new Prayer-Book required, spread with a white cloth, upon which now rested two tall pewter flagons of wine, a flat pewter plate as great as a small dish, and two silver communion-cups—all new. And to one side of this, in a new wainscoted desk, waited worthy Mr. Barton for the coming of his squire—a happy man that day; his face beamed in the spring sunlight; he had on his silk gown, and he eyed, openly, the door through which his new patron was to come.

Then, without sound or warning, except for the footsteps on the paving-stones and the sudden darkening of the sunshine on the floor, there came the figure for which all looked. As he entered he lifted his hand to his head, but dropped it again; and passed on, sturdy, and (you would have said) honest and resolute too, to his seat behind the reading-desk. He was met by silence; he was escorted by silence; and in silence he sat down.

Then the waiting crowd surged in, poured this way and that, and flowed into the benches. And Mr. Barton's voice was raised in holy exhortation.

"At what time soever a sinner doth repent him of his sin from the bottom of his heart, I will put all his wickedness out of remembrance, saith the Lord."

III.

Those who could best observe (for the tale was handed on with the careful accuracy of those who cannot read or write) professed themselves amazed at the assured ease of the squire. No sound came from the seat half-hidden behind the reading-desk where he sat alone; and, during the prayers, when he stood or kneeled, he moved as if he understood well enough what he was at. A great bound Prayer-Book, it was known, rested before him on the book-board, and he was observed to turn the pages more than once.

It was, indeed, a heavy task that Mr. Barton had to do. For first there was the morning prayer, with its psalms, its lessons and its prayers; next the Litany, and

last the communion, in the course of which was delivered one of the homilies set forth by authority, especially designed for the support of those who were no preachers—preceded and followed by a psalm. But all was easy to-day to a man who had such cause for exultation; his voice boomed heartily out; his face radiated his pleasure; and he delivered his homily when the time came, with excellent emphasis and power—all from the reading-desk, except the communion.

Yet it is to be doubted whether the attention of those that heard him was where their pastor would have desired it to be; since even to these country-folk the drama of the whole was evident. There, seen full when he sat down, and in part when he kneeled and stood, was the man who hitherto had stood to them for the old order, the old faith, the old tradition—the man whose horse's footsteps had been heard, times and again, before dawn, in the village street, bearing him to the mystery of the mass; through whose gate strangers had ridden, perhaps three or four times in the year, to find harbourage—strangers dressed indeed as plain gentlemen or yeomen, yet known, every one of them, to be under her Grace's ban, and to ride in peril of liberty if not of life.

Yet here he sat—a man feared and even loved by some—the first of his line to yield to circumstance, and to make peace with his times. Not a man of all who looked on him believed him certainly to be that which his actions professed him to be; some doubted, especially those who themselves inclined to the old ways

or secretly followed them; and the hearts of these grew sick as they watched.

But the crown and climax was yet to come.

The minister finished at last the homily—it was one which inveighed more than once against the popish superstitions; and he had chosen it for that reason, to clench the bargain, so to say—all in due order; for he was a careful man and observed his instructions, unlike some of his brethren who did as they pleased; and, came back again to the long north side of the linen-covered table to finish the service.

He had no man to help him; so he was forced to do it all for himself; so he went forward gallantly, first reading a set of Scripture sentences while the officers collected first for the poor-box, and then, as it was one of the offering-days, collected again the dues for the curate. It was largely upon these, in such poor parishes as was this, that the minister depended and his wife.

Then he went on to pray for the whole estate of Christ's Church militant here on earth, especially for God's "servant, Elizabeth our Queen, that under her we may be godly and quietly governed;" then came the exhortation, urging any who might think himself to be "a blasphemer of God, an hinderer or slanderer of His Word . . . or to be in malice or envy," to bewail his sins, and "not to come to this holy table, lest after the taking of that holy sacrament, the devil enter into him, as he entered into Judas, and fill him full of all iniquities."

So forward with the rest. He read the Comfortable Words; the English equivalent for *Sursum Corda* with the Easter Preface; then another prayer; and finally rehearsed the story of the Institution of the Most Holy Sacrament, though without any blessing of the bread and wine, at least by any action, since none such was ordered in the new Prayer-Book. Then he immediately received the bread and wine himself, and stood up again, holding the silver plate in his hand for an instant, before proceeding to the squire's seat to give him the communion. Meantime, so great was the expectation and interest that it was not until the minister had moved from the table, that the first communicants began to come up to the two white-hung benches, left empty till now, next to the table.

Then those who still watched, and who spread the tale about afterwards, saw that the squire did not move from his seat to kneel down. He had put off his hat again after the homily, and had so sat ever since; and now that the minister came to him, still there he sat.

Now such a manner of receiving was not unknown; yet it was the sign of a Puritan; and, so far from the folk expecting such behaviour in their squire, they had looked rather for Popish gestures, knockings on the breast, signs of the cross.

For a moment the minister stood before the seat, as if doubtful what to do. He held the plate in his left hand and a fragment of bread in his fingers. Then, as he began the words he had to say, one thing at least the people saw, and that was that a great flush dyed the old man's face, though he sat quiet. Then, as the

minister held out the bread, the squire seemed to recover himself; he put out his fingers quickly, took the bread sharply and put it into his mouth; and so sat again, until the minister brought the cup; and this, too, he drank of quickly, and gave it back.

Then, as the communicants, one by one, took the bread and wine and went back to their seats, man after man glanced up at the squire.

But the squire sat there, motionless and upright, like a figure cut of stone.

IV.

The court of the manor seemed deserted half an hour before dinner-time. There was a Sabbath stillness in the air to-day, sweetened, as it were, by the bubbling of bird-music in the pleasaunce behind the hall and the high woods beyond. On the strips of rough turf before the gate and within it bloomed the spring flowers, white and blue. A hound lay stretched in the sunshine on the hall steps, twitching his ears to keep off a persistent fly. You would have sworn that his was the only intelligence in the place.

Yet at the sound of the iron latch of the gate and the squire's footsteps on the stones, the place, so to say, became alive, though in a furtive and secret manner. Over the half door of the stable entrance on the left two faces appeared—one, which was Dick's, sullen and angry, the other, that of a stable-boy, enquiring and frankly interested. This second vanished again as the squire came forward. A figure of a kitchen-boy, in a

white apron, showed in the dark doorway that led to the kitchen and hall, and disappeared again instantly. From two or three upper windows faces peeped and remained fascinated. Only the old hound remained still, twitching his ears.

All this—though there was nothing to be seen but the familiar personage of the place, in his hat and cloak and sword, walking through his own court on his way to dinner, as he had walked a thousand times before. And yet so great was the significance of his coming to-day that the very gate behind him was pushed open by sightseers, who had followed at a safe distance up the path from the church; half a dozen stood there staring, and behind them, at intervals, a score more, spread out in groups, all the way down to the porter's lodge.

The most remarkable feature of all was the silence. Not a voice there spoke, even in a whisper. The maids at the windows above, Dick glowering over the half door, the little group which, far back in the kitchen entrance, peeped and rustled, the men at the gate behind, even the boys in the path—all these held their tongues for interest and a kind of fear. Drama was in the air—the tragedy of seeing the squire come back from church for the first time, bearing himself as he always did, resolute and sturdy, yet changed in his significance after a fashion of which none of these simple hearts had ever dreamed.

So, again in silence, he went up the court, knowing that eyes were upon him, yet showing no sign that he knew it; he went up the steps with the same assured air, and disappeared into the hall.

Then the spell broke up and the bustle began, for it was only half an hour to dinner and guests were coming.

First Dick came out, slashing to the door behind him, and strode out to the gate. He was still in his boots, for he had ridden to Padley and back since early morning with a couple of the maids and the stable-boy. He went to the gate of the court, the group dissolving as he came, and shut it in their faces. A noise of talking came out of the kitchen windows and the clash of a saucepan: the maids' heads vanished from the upper windows.

Even as Dick shut the gate he heard the sound of horses' hoofs down by the porter's lodge. The justices were coming—the two whose names he had heard with amazement last week, as the last corroboration of the incredible rumour of his master's defection. For these were a couple of magistrates—harmless men, indeed, as regarded their hostility to the old Faith—yet Protestants who had sat more than once on the bench in Derby to hear cases of recusancy. Old Mrs. Marpleden had told him they were to come, and that provision must be made for their horses—Mrs. Marpleden, the ancient housekeeper of the manor, who had gone to school for awhile with the Benedictine nuns of Derby in King Henry's days. She had shaken her head and eyed him, and then had suffered three or four tears to fall down her old cheeks.

Well, they were coming, so Dick must open the gate again, and pull the bell for the servants; and this he did, and waited, hat in hand.

Up the little straight road they came, with a ser-

vant or two behind them—the two harmless gentlemen, chattering as they rode; and Dick loathed them in his heart.

“The squire is within?”

“Yes, sir.”

They dismounted, and Dick held their stirrups.

“He has been to church—eh?”

Dick made no answer. He feigned to be busy with one of the saddles.

The magistrate glanced at him sharply.

v.

It was a strange dinner that day.

Outwardly, again, all was as usual—as it might have been on any other Sunday in spring. The three gentlemen sat at the high table, facing down the hall; and, since there was no reading, and since it was a festival, there was no lack of conversation. The servants came in as usual with the dishes—there was roast lamb to-day, according to old usage, among the rest; and three or four wines. A little fire burned against the reredos, for cheerfulness rather than warmth, and the spring sunshine flowed in through the clear-glass windows, bright and genial.

Yet the difference was profound. Certainly there was no talk, overheard at least by the servants, which might not have been on any Sunday for the last twenty years: the congratulations and good wishes, or whatever they were, must have been spoken between the three in the parlour before dinner; and they spoke now of harm-

less usual things—news of the countryside and tales from Derby; gossip of affairs of State; of her Grace, who, in a manner unthinkable, even by now dominated the imagination of England. None of these three had ever seen her; the squire had been to London but once in his life, his two guests never. Yet they talked of her, of her state-craft, of her romanticism; they told little tales, one to the other, as if she lived in the county town. All this, then, was harmless enough. Religion was not mentioned in the hearing of the servants, neither the old nor the new; they talked, all three of them, and the squire loudest of all, though with pauses of pregnant silence, of such things as children might have heard without dismay.

Yet to the servants who came and went, it was as if their master were another man altogether, and his hall some unknown place. There was no blessing of himself before meat: he said something, indeed, before he sat down, but it was unintelligible, and he made no movement with his hand. But it was deeper than this . . . and his men who had served him for ten or fifteen years looked on him as upon a stranger or a changeling.

CHAPTER VII.

I.

THE same Easter Day at Padley was another matter altogether.

As early as five o'clock in the morning the house was astir: lights glimmered in upper rooms; footsteps passed along corridors and across the court; parties began to arrive. All was done without ostentation, yet without concealment, for Padley was a solitary place, and had no fear, at this time, of a sudden descent of the authorities. For form's sake—scarcely for more—a man kept watch over the valley road, and signalled by the flashing of a lamp twice every party with which he was acquainted, and there were no others than these to signal. A second man waited by the gate into the court to admit them. They rode and walked in from all round—great gentlemen, such as the North Lees family, came with a small retinue; a few came alone; yeomen and farm servants, with their women-folk, from the Hathersage Valley, came for the most part on foot. Altogether perhaps a hundred and twenty persons were within Padley Manor—and the gate secured—by six o'clock.

Meanwhile, within, the priest had been busy since

half-past four with the hearing of confessions. He sat in the chapel beside the undecked altar, and they came to him one by one. The household and a few of the nearer neighbours had done their duty in this matter the day before, and a good number had already made their Easter duties earlier in Lent; so by six o'clock all was finished.

Then began the bustle.

A group of ladies, FitzHerberts and Fentons, entered, so soon as the priest gave the signal by tapping on the parlour wall, bearing all things necessary for the altar; and it was astonishing what fine things these were; so that by the time that the priest was ready to vest, the place was transformed. Stuffs and embroideries hung upon the wall about the altar, making it seem, indeed, a sanctuary; two tall silver candlesticks, used for no other purpose, stood upon the linen cloths, under which rested the slate altar-stone, taken, with the sacred vessels and the vestments, from one of the privy hiding-holes, with whose secret not a living being without the house, and not more than two or three within, was acquainted. It was rumoured that half a dozen such places had been contrived within the precincts, two of which were great enough to hold two or three men at a pinch.

Soon after six o'clock, then, the altar was ready and the priest stood vested. He retired a pace from the altar, signed himself with the cross, and with Mr. John FitzHerbert and his son Thomas on either side of him, began the preparation. . . .

It was a strange and an inspiring sight that the young priest (for it was Mr. Simpson who was saying

the mass) looked upon as he turned round after the gospel to make his little sermon. From end to end the tiny chapel was full, packed so that few could kneel and none sit down. The two doors were open, and here two faces peered in; and behind, rank after rank down the steps and along the little passage, the folk stood or knelt, out of sight of both priest and altar, and almost out of sound. The sanctuary was full of children—whose round-eyed, solemn faces looked up at him—children who knew little or nothing of what was passing, except that they were there to worship God, but who, for all that, received impressions and associations that could never thereafter wholly leave them. The chapel was still completely dark, for the faint light of dawn was excluded by the heavy hangings over the windows; and there was but the light of the two tapers to show the people to one another and the priest to them all.

It was an inspiring sight to him then—and one which well rewarded him for his labours, since there was not a class from gentlemen to labourers who was not represented there. The FitzHerberts, the Babingtons, the Fentons—these, with their servants and guests, accounted for perhaps half of the folk. From the shadow by the door peeped out the faces of John Merton and his wife and son; beneath the window was the solemn face of Mr. Mannors the lawyer, with his daughter beside him, Robin Audrey beside her, and Dick his servant behind him. Surely, thought the young priest, the Faith could not be in its final decay, with such a gathering as this.

His little sermon was plain enough for the most foolish there. He spoke of Christ's Resurrection; of how death

Come Rack! Come Rope! I.

had no power to hold Him, nor pains nor prison to detain Him; and he spoke, too, of that mystical life of His which He yet lived in His body, which was the Church; of how death, too, stretched forth his hands against Him there, and yet had no more force to hold Him than in His natural life lived on earth near sixteen hundred years ago; how a Resurrection awaited Him here in England as in Jerusalem, if His friends would be constant and courageous, not faithless, but believing.

"Even here," he said, "in this upper chamber, where we are gathered for fear of the Jews, comes Jesus and stands in the midst, the doors being shut. Upon this altar He will be presently, the Lamb slain yet the Lamb victorious, to give us all that peace which the world can neither give nor take away."

And he added a few words of exhortation and encouragement, bidding them fear nothing whatever might come upon them in the future; to hold fast to the faith once delivered to the saints, and so to attain the heavenly crown. He was not eloquent, for he was but a young man newly come from college, with no great gifts. Yet not a soul there looked upon him, on his innocent, wondering eyes and his quivering lips, but was moved by what he saw and heard.

The priest signed himself with the cross, and turned again to continue the mass.

II.

"You tell me, then," said the girl quietly, "that all is as it was with you? God has told you nothing?"

Robin was silent.

Mass had been done an hour or more, and for the most part the company was dispersed again, after refreshment spread in the hall, except for those who were to stay to dinner, and these two had slipped away at last to talk together in the woods; for the court was still filled with servants coming and going, and the parlours occupied. In one the ladies were still busy with the altar furniture; in the other the priest sat to talk in private with those who were come from a distance; and as for the hall—this, too, was in the hands of the servants, since not less than thirty gentlefolk were to dine there that day.

Robin had come to Booth's Edge at the beginning of Passion week, and had been there ever since. He had refrained, at Marjorie's entreaty, from speaking of her to her parents; and they, too, ruled by their daughter, had held their tongues on the matter. Everything else, however, had been discussed—the effect of the squire's apostasy, the alternatives that presented themselves to the boy, the future behaviour of him to his father—all these things had been spoken of; and even the priest called into council during the last two or three days. Yet not much had come of it. If the worst came to the worst, the lawyer had offered the boy a place in his office; Anthony Babington had proposed

his coming to Dethick if his father turned him out; while Robin himself inclined to a third alternative—the begging of his father to give him a sum of money and be rid of him; after which he proposed, with youthful vagueness, to set off for London and see what he could do there.

Marjorie, however, had seemed strangely uninterested in such proposals. She had listened with patience, bowing her head in assent to each, beginning once or twice a word of criticism, and stopping herself before she had well begun. But she had looked at Robin with more than interest; and her mother had found her more than once on her knees in her own chamber, in tears. Yet she had said nothing, except that she would speak her mind after Easter, perhaps.

And now, it seemed, she was doing it.

“You have had no other thought?” she said again, “besides those of which you talked with my father.”

They were walking together through the woods, half a mile along the Hathersage valley. Beneath them the ground fell steeply away, above them it rose as steeply to the right. Underfoot the new life of spring was burgeoning in mould and grass and undergrowth; for the heather did not come down so far as this; and the daffodils and celandine and wild hyacinth lay in carpets of yellow and blue, infinitely sweet, beneath the shadow of the trees and in the open sunshine. (It was at this time that the squire of Matstead was entering the church and hearing of the promises of the Lord to the sinner who forsook his sinful ways.)

"I have had other thoughts," said the boy slowly, "but they are so wild and foolish that I have determined to think no more of them."

"You are determined?"

He bowed his head.

"You are sure, then, that they are not from God?" asked the girl, torn between fear and hope. He was silent; and her heart sank again.

He looked, indeed, a bewildered boy, borne down by a weight that was too heavy for his years. He walked with his hands behind his back, his hatless head bowed, regarding his feet and the last year's leaves on which he walked. A cuckoo across the valley called with the insistence of one who will be answered.

"My Robin," said the girl. "The last thing I would have you do is to tell me what you would not. . . . Will you not speak to the priest about it?"

"I have spoken to the priest."

"Yes?"

"He tells me he does not know what to think."

"Would you do this thing—whatever it may be—if the priest told you it was God's will?"

There was a pause; and then:

"I do not know," said Robin, so low that she could scarcely hear him.

She drew a deep breath to reassure herself.

"Listen!" she said. "I must say a little of what I think; but not all. Our Lord must finish it to you, if it is according to His will."

He glanced at her swiftly, and down again, like a frightened child. Yet even in that glance he could see that it was all that she could do to force herself to

speak; and by that look he understood for the first
 time something of that which she was suffering.

"You know first," she said, "that I am promised to you. I hold that promise as sacred as anything on earth can be."

Her voice shook a little. The boy bowed his head again. She went on:

“But there are some things,” she said, “more sacred than anything on earth—those things that come from heaven. Now, I wish to say this—and then have done with it: that if such should be God’s will, I would not hold you for a day. We are Catholics, you and I. . . . Your father——”

Her voice broke; and she stopped; yet without leaving go of her hold upon herself. Only she could not speak for a moment.

Then a great fury seized on the boy. It was one of those angers that for awhile poison the air and turn all things sour; yet without obscuring the mind—an anger in which the angry one strikes first at that which he loves most, because he loves it most, knowing, too, that the words he speaks are false. For this, for the present, was the breaking-point in the lad. He had suffered torments in his soul, ever since the hour in which he had ridden into the gate of his own home after his talk in the empty chapel; he had striven to put away from him that idea for which the girl's words had broken an entrance into his heart. And now she would give him no peace; she continued to press on him from without that which already pained him within; so he turned on her.

"You wish to be rid of me!" he cried fiercely.

She looked at him with her lips parted, her eyes astonished, and her face gone white.

"What did you say?" she said.

His conscience pierced him like a sword. Yet he set his teeth.

"You wish to be rid of me. You are urging me to leave you. You talk to me of God's will and God's voice, and you have no pity on me at all. It is an excuse—a blind."

He stood raging. The very fact that he knew every word to be false made his energy the greater; for he could not have said it otherwise.

"You think that!" she whispered.

There, then, they stood, eyeing one another. A stranger, coming suddenly upon them, would have said it was a lovers' tiff, and have laughed at it. Yet it was a deeper matter than that.

Then there surged over the boy a wave of shame; and the truth prevailed. His fair face went scarlet; and his eyes filled with tears. He dropped on his knees in the leaves, seized her hand and kissed it.

"Oh! you must forgive me," he said. "But . . . but I cannot do it!"

III.

It was a great occasion in the hall that Easter Day. The three tables, which, according to custom, ran along the walls, were filled to-day with guests; and a second dinner was to follow, scarcely less splendid than the first, for their servants, as well as for those of the household.

The floor was spread with new rushes; jugs of March beer, a full month old, as it should be, were ranged down the tables; and by every plate lay a posy of flowers. From the passage outside came the sound of music.

The feast began with the reading of the Gospel; at the close, Mr. John struck with his hand upon the table as a signal for conversation; the doors opened; the servants came in, and a babble of talk broke out. At the high table the master of the house presided, with the priest on his right, Mrs. Manners and Marjorie beyond him; on his left, Mrs. Fenton and her lord. At the other two tables Mr. Thomas presided at one and Mr. Babington at the other.

The talk was, of course, within the bounds of discretion; though once and again sentences were spoken which would scarcely have pleased the minister of the parish. For they were difficult times in which they lived; and it is no wonder at all if bitterness mixed itself with charity. Here was Mr. John, for instance, come to Padley expressly for the selling of some meadows to meet his fines; here was his son Thomas, the heir now, not only to Padley, but to Norbury, whose lord, his uncle, lay in the Fleet Prison. Here was Mr. Fenton, who had suffered the like in the matter of fines more than once. Hardly one of the folk there but had paid a heavy price for his conscience; and all the worship that was permitted to them, and that by circumstance, and not by law, was such as they had engaged in that morning with shuttered windows and a sentinel for fear that, too, should be silenced.

They talked, then, guardedly of those things, since

the servants were in and out continually, and though all professed the same faith as their masters, yet these were times that tried loyalty hard. Mr. John, indeed, gave news of his brother Sir Thomas, and said how he did; and read a letter, too, from Italy, from his younger brother Nicholas, who was fled abroad after a year's prison at Oxford; but the climax of the talk came when dinner was over, and the muscadel, with the mould-jellies, had been put upon the tables. It was at this moment that Mr. John nodded to his son, who went to the door to see the servants out, and stood by it to see that none listened. Then his father struck his hands together for silence, and himself spoke.

"Mr. Simpson," he said, "has something to say to us all. It is not a matter to be spoken of lightly, as you will understand presently. . . . Mr. Simpson."

The priest looked up timidly, pulling out a paper from his pocket.

"You have heard of Mr. Nelson?" he said to the company. "Well, he was a priest; and I have news of his death. He was executed in London on the third of February for his religion. And another man, a Mr. Sherwood, was executed a few days afterwards."

There was a rustle along the benches. Some there had heard of the fact, but no more; some had heard nothing of either the man or his death. Two or three faces turned a shade paler; and then the silence settled down again. For here was a matter that touched them all closely enough; since up to now scarcely a priest except Mr. Cuthbert Maine had suffered death for his religion; and even of him some of the more tolerant said that it was treason with which he was charged.

They had heard, indeed, of a priest or two having been sent abroad into exile for his faith; but the most of them thought it a thing incredible that in England at this time a man should suffer death for it. Fines and imprisonment were one thing; to such they had become almost accustomed. But death was another matter altogether. And for a priest! Was it possible that the days of King Harry were coming back; and that every Catholic henceforth should go in peril of his life as well as of liberty?

The folks settled themselves then in their seats; one or two men drank off a glass of wine.

"I have heard from a good friend of mine in London," went on the priest, looking at his paper, "one who followed every step of the trial; and was present at the death. They suffered at Tyburn. . . . However, I will tell you what he says. He is a countryman of mine, from Yorkshire; as was Mr. Nelson, too.

"Mr. Nelson was taken in London on the first of December last year. He was born at Shelton, and was about forty-three years old; he was the son of Sir Nicholas Nelson.

"So much," said the priest, looking up from his paper, "I knew myself. I saw him about four years ago just before he went to Douai, and he came back to England as a priest, a year and a half after. Mr. Sherwood was not a priest; he had been at Douai, too, but as a scholar only. . . . Well, we will speak of Mr. Nelson first. This is what my friend says."

He spread the paper before him on the table; and Marjorie, looking past her mother, saw that his hands shook as he spread it.

“‘Mr. Nelson,’” began the priest, reading aloud with some difficulty, “‘was brought before my lords, and first had tendered to him the oath of the Queen’s supremacy. This he refused to take, saying that no lay prince could have pre-eminence over Christ’s Church; and, upon being pressed as to who then could have it, answered, Christ’s Vicar only, the successor of Peter. Further, he proceeded to say, under questioning, that since the religion of England at this time is schismatic and heretical, so also is the Queen’s Grace who is head of it.

“‘This, then, was what was wanted; and after a delay of a few weeks, the same questions being put to him, and his answers being the same, he was sentenced to death. He was very fortunate in his imprisonment. I had speech with him two or three times and was the means, by God’s blessing, of bringing another priest to him, to whom he confessed himself; and with whom he received the Body of Christ a day before he suffered.

“‘On the third of February, knowing nothing of his death being so near, he was brought up to a higher part of the prison, and there told he was to suffer that day. His kinsmen were admitted to him then, to bid him farewell; and afterwards two ministers came to turn him from his faith if they could; but they prevailed nothing.’”

There was a pause in the reading; but there was no movement among any that listened. Robin, watching from his place at the right-hand table, cold at heart, ran his eyes along the faces. The priest was as white as death, with the excitement, it seemed, of having to tell such a tale. His host beside him seemed downcast and quiet, but perfectly composed. Mrs. Manners had

her eyes closed; Anthony Babington was frowning to himself with tight lips; Marjorie he could not see.

With a great effort the reader resumed:

“When he was laid on the hurdle he refused to ask pardon of the Queen’s Grace; for, said he, I have never yet offended her. I was beside him, and heard it. And he added, when those who stood near stormed at him, that it was better to be hanged than to burn in hell-fire.

“There was a great concourse of people at Tyburn, but kept back by the officers so that they could not come at him. When he was in the cart, first he commended his spirit into God’s Hands, saying *In manus tuas*, etc.; then he besought all Catholics that were present to pray for him; I saw a good many who signed themselves in the crowd; and then he said some prayers in Latin; with the psalms *Miserere* and *De Profundis*. And then he addressed himself to the people, telling them he died for his religion, which was the Catholic Roman one, and prayed, and desired them to pray, that God would bring all Englishmen into it. The crowd cried out at that, exclaiming against this *Catholic Romish Faith*; and so he said what he had to say, over again. Then, before the cart was drawn away from him to leave him to hang, he asked pardon of all them he had offended, and even of the Queen, if he had indeed offended her. Then one of the sheriffs called on the hangman to make an end; so Mr. Nelson prayed again in silence, and then begged all Catholics that were there once more to pray that, by the bitter passion of Christ his soul might be received into everlasting joy. And they did so; for as the cart was drawn away a great

number cried out, and I with them, *Lord receive his soul.*

“‘He was cut down, according to sentence, before he was dead, and the butchery begun on him; and when it was near over, he moved a little in his pain, and said that he forgave the Queen and all that caused or consented to his death: and so he died.’”

The priest's voice, which had shaken again and again, grew so tremulous as he ended that those that were at the end of the hall could scarcely hear him; and, as it ceased, a murmur ran along the seats.

Mr. FitzHerbert leaned over to the priest and whispered. The priest nodded, and the other held up his hand for silence.

“There is more yet,” he said.

Mr. Simpson, with a hand that still shook so violently that he could hardly hold his glass, lifted and drank off a cup of muscadel. Then he cleared his throat, sat up a little in his chair, and resumed:

“‘Next I went to see Mr. Sherwood, to talk to him in prison and to encourage him by telling him of the passion of the other and how bravely he bore it. Mr. Sherwood took it very well, and said that he was afraid of nothing, that he had reconciled his mind to it long ago, and had rehearsed it all two or three times, so that he would know what to say and how to bear himself.’”

Mr. FitzHerbert leaned over again to the priest at this point and whispered something. Mr. Simpson nodded, and raised his eyes.

“Mr. Sherwood,” he said, “was a scholar from Douai, but not a priest. He was lodging in the house

of a Catholic lady, and had procured mass to be said there, and it was through her son that he was taken and charged with recusancy."

Again ran a rustle through the benches. This executing of the laity for religion was a new thing in their experience. The priest lifted the paper again.

"I found that Mr. Sherwood had been racked many times in the Tower, during the six months he was in prison, to force him to tell, if they could, where he had heard mass and who had said it. But they could prevail nothing. Further, no visitor was admitted to him all this time, and I was the first and the last that he had; and that though Mr. Roper himself had tried to get at him for his relief; for he was confined underground and lay in chains and filth not to be described. I said what I could to him, but he said he needed nothing and was content, though his pain must have been very great all this while, what with the racking repeated over and over again and the place he lay in.

"I was present again when he suffered at Tyburn, but was too far away to hear anything that he said, and scarcely, indeed, could see him; but I learned afterwards that he died well and courageously, as a Catholic should, and made no outcry or complaint when the butchery was done on him.

"This, then, is the news I have to send you—sorrowful, indeed, yet joyful, too; for surely we may think that they who bore such pains for Christ's sake with such constancy will intercede for us whom they leave behind. I am hoping myself to come North again before I go to Douai next year, and will see you then and tell you more."

The priest laid down the paper, trembling.

Mr. FitzHerbert looked up.

"It will give pleasure to the company," he said, "to know that the writer of the letter is Mr. Ludlam, from Radbourne, in this county. As you have heard, he, too, hopes by God's mercy to be made priest and to come back to England."

CHAPTER VIII.

I.

IN the following week Robin went home again.

The clear weather of Easter had broken, and racing clouds, thick as a pall, sped across the sky that had been so blue and so cheerful; a wind screamed all day, now high, now low, shattering the tender flowers of spring, ruffling the Derwent against its current, by which he rode, and dashing spatters of rain now and again on his back, tossing high and wide the branches under which he went, until the woods themselves became as a great melancholy organ, making sad music about him.

When a mind is fluent and uncertain there is no describing it. He thought he had come to a decision last week; he found that the decision was shattered as soon as made. He had talked to the priest; he had resisted Marjorie; and yet to neither of them had he put into formal words what it was that troubled him. He had asked questions about vocation, about the place that circumstance occupies in it, of the value of dispositions, fears, scruples, and resistance. He had, that is, fingered his wound, half uncovered it, and then covered it up again, tormented it, glanced at it and then glanced

aside; yet the one thing he had not done was to probe it—not even to allow another to do so.

His mind, then, was fluent and distracted; it formed images before him, which dissolved as soon as formed; it whirled in little eddies; it threw up obscuring foam; it ran clear one instant, and the next broke itself in rapids. He could neither ease it, nor dam it altogether, and he did not know what to do.

As he rode through Froggatt, he saw a group of saddle-horses standing at the inn door, but thought nothing of it, till a man ran out of the door, still holding his pot, and saluted him, and he recognised him to be one of Mr. Babington's men.

"My master is within, sir," he said; "he bade me look out for you."

Robin drew rein, and as he did so, Anthony, too, came out.

"Ah!" he said. "I heard you would be coming this way. Will you come in? I have something to say to you."

Robin slipped off, leaving his mare in the hands of Anthony's man, since he himself was riding alone, with his valise strapped on behind.

It was a little room, very trim and well kept, on the first floor, to which his friend led him. Anthony shut the door carefully and came across to the settle by the window-seat.

"Well," he said, "I have bad news for you, my friend. Will you forgive me? I have seen your father and had words with him."

"Eh?"

"I said nothing to you before," went on the other, sitting down beside him. "I knew you would not have it so, but I went to see for myself and to put a question or two. He is your father, but he has also been my friend. That gives me rights, you see!"

"Tell me," said Robin heavily.

It appeared that Anthony, who was a precise as well as an ardent young man, had had scruples about trusting to hearsay. Certainly it was rumoured far and wide that the squire of Matstead had done as he had said he would do, and gone to church; but Mr. Anthony was one of those spirits who will always have things, as they say, from the fountain-head; partly from instincts of justice, partly, no doubt, for the pleasure of making direct observations to the principals concerned. This was what he had done in this case. He had ridden, without a word to any, up to Matstead, and had demanded to be led to the squire; and there and then, refusing to sit down till he was answered, had put his question. There had been a scene. The squire had referred to puppies who wanted drowning, to young sparks, and to such illustrative similes; and Anthony, in spite of his youthful years, had flared out about turncoats and lickspittles. There had been a very pretty ending: the squire had shouted for his servants and Anthony for his, and the two parties had eyed one another, growling like dogs, until bloodshed seemed imminent. Then the visitor had himself solved the situation by stalking out of the house from which the squire was proposing to flog him, mounting his horse, and with a last compliment or two had ridden away. And here he was at Froggatt on his return journey,

having eaten there that dinner which no longer would be spread for him at Matstead.

Robin sat silent till the tale was done, and at the end of it Anthony was striding about the room, aflame again with wrath, gesticulating and raging aloud.

Then Robin spoke, holding up his hand for moderation. "You will have the whole house here," he said. "Well, you have cooked my goose for me."

"Bah! that was cooked at Passiontide when you went to Booth's Edge. Do you think he'll ever have a Papist in his house again?"

"Did he say so?"

"No; but he said enough about his 'young cub.' . . . Nonsense, man! Come home with me to Dethick. We'll find occupation enough."

"Did he say he would not have me home again?"

"No," bawled Anthony. "I have told you he did not say so outright. But he said enough to show he'd have no rebels, as he called them, in his Protestant house! Dick's to leave. Did you hear that?"

"Dick!"

"Why, certainly. There was a to-do on Sunday, and Dick spoke his mind. He'll come to me, he says, if you have no service for him."

Robin set his teeth. It seemed as if the pelting blows would never cease.

"Come with me to Dethick!" said Anthony again. "I tell you——"

"Well?"

"There'll be time enough to tell you when you come. But I promise you occupation enough."

He paused, as if he would say more and dared not.

"You must tell me more," said the lad slowly. "What kind of occupation?"

Then Anthony did a queer thing. He first glanced at the door, and then went to it quickly and threw it open. The little lobby was empty. He went out, leaned over the stair and called one of his men.

"Sit you there," he said, with the glorious nonchalance of a Babington, "and let no man by till I tell you."

He came back, closed the door, bolted it, and then came across and sat down by his friend.

"Do you think the rest of us are doing nothing?" he whispered. "Why, I tell you that a dozen of us in Derbyshire——" He broke off once more. "I may not tell you," he said, "I must ask leave first."

A light began to glimmer before Robin's mind; the light broadened suddenly and intensely, and his whole soul leapt to meet it.

"Do you mean——?" And then he, too, broke off, well knowing enough, though not all of, what was meant.

It was quiet here within this room, in spite of the village street outside. It was dinner-time, and all were within doors or out at their affairs; and except for the stamp of a horse now and again, and the scream of the wind in the keyhole and between the windows, there was little to hear. And in the lad's soul was a tempest.

He knew well enough now what his friend meant, though nothing of the details; and from the secrecy and excitement of the young man's manner he understood what the character of his dealings would likely be, and towards those dealings his whole nature leaped as a

fish to the water. Was it possible that this way lay the escape from his own torment of conscience? Yet he must put a question first, in honesty.

"Tell me this much," he said in a low voice. "Do you mean that this . . . this affair will be against men's lives . . . or . . . or such as even a priest might engage in?"

Then the light of fanaticism leaped to the eyes of his friend, and his face brightened wonderfully.

"Do they observe the courtesies and forms of law?" he snarled. "Did Nelson die by God's law, or did Sherwood—those we know of? I will tell you this," he said, "and no more unless you pledge yourself to us . . . that we count it as warfare—in Christ's Name yes—but warfare for all that."

There then lay the choice before this lad, and surely it was as hard a choice as ever a man had to make. On the one side lay such an excitement as he had never yet known—for Anthony was no merely mad fool—a path, too, that gave him hopes of Marjorie, that gave him an escape from home without any more ado, a task besides which he could tell himself honestly was, at least, for the cause that lay so near to Marjorie's heart, and was beginning to lie near his own. And on the other there was open to him that against which he had fought now day after day, in misery—a life that had no single attraction to the natural man in him, a life that meant the loss of Marjorie for ever.

The colour died from his lips as he considered this. Surely all lay Anthony's way: Anthony was a gentleman like himself; he would do nothing that was not worthy

of one. . . . What he had said of warfare was surely sound logic. Were they not already at war? Had not the Queen declared it? And on the other side—nothing. Nothing. Except that a voice within him on that other side cried louder and louder—it seemed in despair: “This is the way; walk in it.”

“Come,” whispered Anthony again.

Robin stood up; he made as if to speak; then he silenced himself and began to walk to and fro in the little room. He could hear voices from the room beneath—Anthony’s men talking there no doubt. They might be his men, too, at the lifting of a finger—they and Dick. There were the horses waiting without; he heard the jingle of a bit as one tossed his head. Those were the horses that would go back to Dethick and Derby, and, may be, half over England.

He walked to and fro half a dozen times without speaking, and, if he had but guessed it, he might have been comforted to know that his manhood flowed in upon him, as a tide coming in over a flat beach. These instants added more years to him than as many months that had gone before. His boyhood was passing, since experience and conflict, whether it end in victory or defeat, give the years to a man far more than the passing of time. So in God’s sight Robin added many inches to the stature of his spirit in this little parlour of Froggatt.

Yet, though he conquered then, he did not know that he conquered. He still believed, as he turned at last and faced his friend, that his mind was yet to make up, and his whisper was harsh and broken.

"I do not know," he whispered. "I must go home first."

II.

Dick was waiting by the porter's lodge as the boy rode in, and walked up beside him with his brown hand on the horse's shoulder. Robin could not say much, and, besides, his confidence must be tied.

"So you are going," he said softly.

The man nodded.

"I met Mr. Babington. . . . You cannot do better, I think, than go to him."

It was with a miserable heart that an hour or two later he came down to supper. His father was already at table, sitting grimly in his place; he made no sign of welcome or recognition as his son came in. During the meal itself this was of no great consequence, as silence was the custom; but the boy's heart sank yet further as, still without a word to him, the squire rose from table at the end and went as usual through the parlour door. He hesitated a moment before following. Then he grasped his courage and went after.

All things were as usual there—the wine set out and the sweetmeats, and his father in his usual place. Yet still there was silence.

Robin began to meditate again, yet alert for a sign or a word. It was in this little room, he understood, that the dispute with Anthony had taken place a few hours before, and he looked round it, almost wondering

that all seemed so peaceful. It was this room, too, that was associated with so much that was happy in his life—drawn-out hours after supper, when his father was in genial moods, or when company was there—company that would never come again—and laughter and gallant talk went round. There was the fire burning in the new stove—that which had so much excited him only a year or two ago, for it was then the first that he had ever seen: there was the table where he had written his little letter; there was “Christ carrying His Cross.”

“So you have sent your friend to insult me, now!”

Robin started. The voice was quiet enough, but full of a suppressed force.

“I have not, sir. I met Mr. Babington at Froggatt on his way back. He told me. I am very sorry for it.”

“And you talked with him at Padley, too, no doubt?”

“Yes, sir.”

His father suddenly wheeled round on him.

“Do you think I have no sense, then? Do you think I do not know what you and your friends speak of?”

Robin was silent.

He was astonished how little afraid he was. His heart beat loud enough in his ears; yet he felt none of that helplessness that had fallen on him before when his father was angry. . . . Certainly he had added to his stature in the parlour at Froggatt.

The old man poured out a glass of wine and drank it. His face was flushed high, and he was using more words than usual.

“Well, sir, there are other affairs we must speak of; and then no more of them. I wish to know your meaning for the time to come. There must be no more fool-

ing this way and that. I shall pay no fines for you—mark that! If you must stand on your own feet, stand on them. . . . Now then!”

“Do you mean, am I coming to church with you, sir?”

“I mean, who is to pay your fines? . . . Miss Marjorie?”

Robin set his teeth at the sneer.

“I have not yet been fined, sir.”

“Now do you take me for a fool? D’you think they’ll let you off? I was speaking——”

The old man stopped.

“Yes, sir?”

The other wheeled his face on him.

“If you will have it,” he said, “I was speaking to my two good friends who dined here on Sunday. I was plain with them; and they were plain with me. ‘I shall not pay for my brat of a son,’ I said. ‘Then he must pay for himself,’ said they, ‘unless we lay him by the heels.’ ‘Not in my house, I hope,’ I said; and they laughed at that. We were very merry together.”

“Yes, sir?”

“Good God! have I a fool for a son? I ask you again, Who is it to pay?”

“When will they demand it?”

“Why, they may demand it next week, if they will! You were not at church on Sunday!”

“I was not in Matstead,” said the lad.

“But——”

“And Mr. Barton will not, I think——”

The old man struck the table suddenly and violently.

“I have dropped words enough,” he cried. “Where’s

the use of it? If you think they will let you alone, I tell you they will not. There are to be doings before Christmas, at latest; and what then?"

Then Robin drew his breath sharply between his teeth; and knew that one more step had been passed, that had separated him from that which he feared. . . . He had come just now, still hesitating. Still there had been passing through his mind hopes and ideas of what his father might do for him. He knew well enough that he would never pay the fines, amounting sometimes to as much as twenty pounds a month; but he had thought that perhaps his father would give him a sum of money and let him go to fend for himself; that he might help him even to a situation somewhere; and now hope had died so utterly that he did not even dare to speak of it. And he had said "No" to Anthony; he said to himself at least that he had meant "No," in spite of his hesitation. All doors seemed closing, save that which terrified him. . . .

"I have thought in my mind——" he began; and stopped, for the terror of what was on his tongue grew suddenly upon him.

"Eh?"

Robin stood up.

"I must have time, sir," he cried; "I must have time. Do not press me too much."

His father's eyes shone bright and wrathful. He beat on the table with his open hand; but the boy was too quick for him.

"I beg of you, sir, not to make me speak too soon. It may be that you would hate that I should speak more than my silence."

His whole person was tense and magnetic; his face was paler than ever; and it seemed as if his father understood enough, at least, to make him hesitate. The two looked at one another; and it was the man's eyes that fell first.

"You may have till Pentecost," he said.

III.

It would be at about an hour before dawn that Robin awoke for perhaps the third or fourth time that night; for the conflict still roared within his soul and would give him no peace. And, as he lay there, awake in an instant, staring up into the dark, once more weighing and balancing this and the other, swayed by enthusiasm at one moment, weighed down with melancholy the next—there came to him, distinct and clear through the still night, the sound of horses' hoofs, perhaps of three or four beasts, walking together.

Now, whether it was the ferment of his own soul, or the work of some interior influence, or indeed, the very intimation of God Himself, Robin never knew (though he inclined later to the last of these); yet it remains as a fact that when he heard that sound, so fierce was his curiosity to know who it was that rode abroad in company at such an hour, he threw off the blankets that covered him, went to his window and threw it open. Further, when he had listened there a second or two, and had heard the sound cease and then break out again clearer and nearer, signifying that the party was riding through the village, his curiosity grew so intense,

that he turned from the window, snatched up and put on a few clothes, groping for them as well as he could in the dimness, and was presently speeding, barefooted, downstairs, telling himself in one breath that he was a fool, and in the next that he must reach the churchyard wall before the horses did.

It was but a short run when he had come down into the court, by the little staircase that led from the men's rooms; the ground was soaking with the rains of yesterday, but he cared nothing for that; and, as the riding party turned up the little ascent that led beneath the churchyard, Robin, on the other side of the wall, was keeping between the tombstones to see, and not be seen.

It was within an hour of dawn, at that time when the sky begins to glimmer with rifts above the two horizons, showing light enough at least to distinguish faces. It was such a light as that in which he had seen the deer looking at him motionless as he rode home with Dick. Yet the three who now rode up towards him were so muffled about the faces that he feared he would not know them. They were men, all three of them; and he could make out valises strapped to the saddle of each; but, what seemed strange, they did not speak as they came; and it appeared as if they wished to make no more noise than was necessary, since one of them, when his horse set his foot upon the cobble-stones beside the lych-gate, pulled him sharply off them.

And then, just as they rounded the angle of the wall where the boy crouched peeping, the man that rode in the middle, sighed as if with relief, and pulled the cloak that was about him, so that the collar fell from his face,

and at the same time turned to his companion on his right, and said something in a low voice.

But the boy heard not a word; for he found himself staring at the thin-faced young priest from whom he had received Holy Communion at Padley. It was but for an instant; for the man to whom the priest spoke answered in the same low voice, and the other pulled his cloak again round his mouth.

Yet the look was enough. The sight, once more, of this servant of God, setting out again upon his perilous travels—seen at such a moment, when the boy's judgment hung in the balance (as he thought); this one single reminder of what a priest could do in these days of sorrow, and of what God called on him to do—the vision, for it was scarcely less, all things considered, of a life such as this—presented, so to say, in this single scene of a furtive and secret ride before the dawn, leaving Padley soon after midnight—this, falling on a soul that already leaned that way, finished that for which Marjorie had prayed, and against which the lad himself had fought so fiercely.

Half an hour later he stood by his father's bed, looking down on him without fear.

"Father," he said, as the old man stared up at him through sleep-ridden eyes, "I have come to give you my answer. It is that I must go to Rheims and be a priest."

Then he turned again and went out of the room, without waiting.

CHAPTER IX.

I.

MRS. MANNERS was still abed when her daughter came in to see her. She lay in the great chamber that gave upon the gallery above the hall whence, on either side, she could hear whether or no the maids were at their business—which was a comfort to her if a discomfort to them. And now that her lord was in Derby, she lay here all alone.

The first that she knew of her daughter's coming was a light in her eyes; and the next was a face, as of a stranger, looking at her with great eyes, exalted by joy and pain. The light, held below, cast shadows upwards from chin and cheek, and the eyes shone in hollows. Then, as she sat up, she saw that it was her daughter, and that the maid held a paper in her hands; she was in her night-linen, and a wrap lay over her shoulders and shrouded her hair.

"He is to be a priest," she whispered sharply. "Thank our Lord with me . . . and . . . and God have mercy on me!"

Then Marjorie was on her knees by the bedside, sobbing so that the curtains shook.

The mother got it all out of her presently—the tale of the girl's heart torn two ways at once. On the one side there was her human love for the lad who had wooed her—as hot as fire, and as pure—and on the other that keen romance that had made her pray that he might be a priest. This second desire had come to her, as sharp as a voice that calls, when she had heard of the apostacy of his father; it had seemed to her the riposte that God made to the assault upon His honour. The father would no longer be His worshipper? Then let the son be His priest; and so the balance be restored. And so the maid had striven with the two loves that, for once, would not agree together (as did the man in the Gospels who wished to go and bury his father and afterwards to follow his Saviour); she had not dared to say a word to the lad of anything of this, lest it should be her will and not God's that should govern him, for she knew very well what a power she had over him; but she had prayed God, and begged Robin to pray too and to listen to His voice; and now she had her way, and her heart was broken with it, she said.

“And when I think,” she wailed across her mother's knees, “of what it is to be a priest; and of the life that he will lead, and of the death that he may die! . . . And it is I . . . I . . . who will have sent him to it. Mother! . . .”

Mrs. Manners was bethinking herself of a cordial just then, and how she knew old Ann would be coming presently, and was listening with but half an ear.

“It's not you, my dear,” she said, patting the head beneath her hands. (The wrap was fallen off, and the

maid's long hair was all over her shoulders.) "And now——"

"But our Lord will take care of him, will He not? And not suffer——"

Mrs. Manners fell to patting her head again.

"And who brought the message?" she asked.

Mrs. Manners was one of those experienced persons who are fully persuaded that youth is a disease that must be borne with patiently. Time, indeed, will cure it; yet until the cure is complete, elders must bear it as well as they can and not seem to pay too much attention to it. A rigorous and prudent diet; long hours of sleep, plenty of occupation—these are the remedies for the fever. So, while Marjorie first began to read the lad's letter, and then, breaking down altogether, thrust it into her mother's hand, Mrs. Manners was searching her memory as to whether any imprudence the day before, in food or behaviour, could be the cause of this crisis. Love between boys and girls was common enough; she herself twenty years ago had suffered from the sickness when young John had come wooing her; yet a love that could thrust from it that which it loved, was beyond her altogether. Either Marjorie loved the lad, or she did not, and if she loved him, why did she pray that he might be a priest? That was foolishness; since priesthood was a bar to marriage. She began to conclude that Marjorie did not love him; it had been but a romantic fancy; and she was encouraged by the thought.

"Madge," she began, when she had read through the confused line or two, in the half-boyish, half-clerkly hand

of Robin, scribbled and dispatched by the hands of Dick scarcely two hours ago. "Madge——"

She was about to say something sensible when the maid interrupted her again.

"And it is I who have brought it all on him!" she wailed. "If it had not been for me——"

Her mother laid a firm hand on her daughter's mouth. It was not often that she felt the superior of the two; yet here was a time, plain enough, when maturity and experience must take the reins.

"Madge," she said, "it is plain you do not love him; or you would never——"

The maid started back, her eyes ablaze.

"Not love him! Why——"

"That you do not love him truly; or you would never have wished this for him. . . . Now listen to me!"

She raised an admonitory finger, complacent at last. But her speech was not to be made at that time; for her daughter swiftly rose to her feet, controlled at last by the shock of astonishment.

"Then I do not think you know what love is," she said softly. "To love is to wish the other's highest good, as I understand it."

Mrs. Manners compressed her lips, as might a prophetess before a prediction. But her daughter was beforehand with her again.

"That is the love of a Christian, at least," she said. Then she stooped, took the letter from her mother's knees, and went out.

Mrs. Manners sat for a moment as her daughter left her. Then she understood that her hour of superiority was gone with Marjorie's hour of weakness; and she

emitted a short laugh as she took her place again behind the child she had borne.

II.

It was a strange time that Marjorie had until two days later, when Robin came and told her all, and how it had fallen out. For now, it seemed, she walked on air; now in shoes of lead. When she was at her prayers (which was pretty often just now), and at other times, when the air lightened suddenly about her and the burdens of earth were lifted as if another hand were put to them—at those times which every interior soul experiences in a period of stress—why, then, all was glory, and she saw Robin as transfigured and herself beneath him all but adoring. Little visions came and went before her imagination. Robin riding, like some knight on an adventure, to do Christ's work; Robin at the altar, in his vestments; Robin absolving penitents—all in a rosy light of faith and romance. She saw him even on the scaffold, undaunted and resolute, with God's light on his face, and the crowd awed beneath him; she saw his soul entering heaven, with all the harps ringing to meet him, and eternity begun. . . . And then, at other times, when the heaviness came down on her, as clouds upon the Derbyshire hills, she understood nothing but that she had lost him; that he was not to be hers, but Another's; that a loveless and empty life lay before her, and a womanhood that was without its fruition. And it was this latter mood that fell on her, swift and entire, when, looking out from her window a little before dinner-

time, she saw suddenly his hat, and Cecily's head, jerking up the steep path that led to the house.

She fell on her knees by her bedside.

"Jesu!" she cried. "Jesu! Give me strength to meet him."

Mrs. Manners, too, hearing the horse's footsteps on the pavement a minute later, and Marjorie's steps going downstairs, also looked forth and saw him dismounting. She was a prudent woman, and did not stir a finger till she heard the bell ringing in the court for the dinner to be served. They would have time, so she thought, to arrange their attitudes.

And, indeed, she was right: for it was two quiet enough persons who met her as she came down into the hall: Robin flushed with riding, yet wholly under his own command—bright-eyed, and resolute and natural (indeed, it seemed to her that he was more of a man than she had thought him). And her daughter, too, was still and strong; a trifle paler than she should be, yet that was to be expected. At dinner, of course, nothing could be spoken of but the most ordinary affairs—in such speaking, that is, as there was. It was not till they had gone out into the walled garden and sat them down, all three of them, on the long garden-seat beside the rose-beds, that a word was said on these new matters. There was silence as they walked there, and silence as they sat down.

"Tell her, Robin," said the maid.

It appeared that matters were not yet as wholly decided as Mrs. Manners had thought. Indeed, it seemed

to her that they were not decided at all. Robin had written to Dr. Allen, and had found means to convey his letter to Mr. Simpson, who, in his turn, had undertaken to forward it at least as far as to London; and there it would await a messenger to Douai. It might be a month before it would reach Douai, and it might be three or four months, or even more, before an answer could come back. Next, the squire had taken a course of action which, plainly, had disconcerted the lad, though it had its conveniences too. For, instead of increasing the old man's fury, the news his son had given him had had a contrary effect. He had seemed all shaken, said Robin; he had spoken to him quietly, holding in the anger that surely must be there, the boy thought, without difficulty. And the upshot of it was that no more had been said as to Robin's leaving Matstead for the present—not one word even about the fines. It seemed almost as if the old man had been trying how far he could push his son, and had recoiled when he had learned the effect of his pushing.

"I think he is frightened," said the lad gravely. "He had never thought that I could be a priest."

Mrs. Manners considered this in silence.

"And it may be autumn before Dr. Allen's letter comes back?" she asked presently.

Robin said that that was so.

"It may even be till winter," he said. "The talk among the priests, Mr. Simpson tells me, is all about the removal from Douai. It may be made at any time, and who knows where they will go?"

Mrs. Manners glanced across at her daughter, who sat motionless, with her hands clasped. Then she was

filled with the spirit of reasonableness and sense: all this tragic to-do about what might never happen seemed to her the height of folly.

"Nay, then," she burst out, "then nothing may happen after all. Dr. Allen may say 'No'; the letter may never get to him. It may be that you will forget all this in a month or two."

Robin turned his face slowly towards her, and she saw that she had spoken at random. Again, too, it struck her attention that his manner seemed a little changed. It was graver than that to which she was accustomed.

"I shall not forget it," he said softly. "And Dr. Allen will get the letter. Or, if not he, someone else."

There was silence again, but Mrs. Manners heard her daughter draw a long breath.

III.

It was an hour later that Marjorie found herself able to say that which she knew must be said.

Robin had lingered on, talking of this and that, though he had said half a dozen times that he must be getting homewards; and at last, when he rose, Mistress Manners, who was still wholly misconceiving the situation, after the manner of sensible middle-aged folk, archly and tactfully took her leave and disappeared down towards the house, advancing some domestic reason for her departure.

Robin sighed, and turned to the girl, who still sat

quiet. But as he turned she lifted her eyes to him swiftly.

"Good-bye, Mr. Robin," she said.

He pulled himself up.

"You understand, do you not?" she said. "You are to be a priest. You must remember that always. You are a sort of student already."

She could see him pale a little; his lips tightened. For a moment he said nothing; he was taken wholly aback.

"Then I am not to come here again?"

Marjorie stood up. She showed no sign of the fierce self-control she was using.

"Why, yes," she said. "Come as you would come to any Catholic neighbours. But no more than that. . . . You are to be a priest."

The spring air was full of softness and sweetness as they stood there. On the trees behind them and on the roses in front the budding leaves had burst into delicate green, and the copses on all sides sounded with the twittering of birds. The whole world, it seemed, was kindling with love and freshness. Yet these two had to stand here and be cold, one to the other. . . . He was to be a priest; that must not be forgotten, and they must meet no more on the old footing. That was gone. Already he stood among the Levites, at least in intention; and the Lord alone was to be the portion of his inheritance and his Cup.

It was a minute before either of them moved, and during that minute the maid felt her courage ebb from

her like an outgoing tide, leaving a desolation behind. It was all that she could do not to cry out.

But when at last Robin made a movement and she had to look him in the face, what she saw there braced and strengthened her.

"You are right, Mistress Marjorie," he said both gravely and kindly. "I will bid you good day and be getting to my horse."

He kissed her gently, as the manner was, and went down the path alone.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

I.

IT was with a sudden leap of her heart that Marjorie, looking out of her window at the late autumn landscape, her mind still running on the sheet of paper that lay before her, saw a capped head, and then a horse's crest, rise over the broken edge of land up which Robin had ridden so often two and three years ago. Then she saw who was the rider, and laid her pen down again.

It was two years since the lad had gone to Rheims, and it would be five years more, she knew (since he was not over quick at his books), before he would return a priest. She had letters from him: one would come now and again, a month or two sometimes after the date of writing. It was only in September that she had had the letter which he had written her on hearing of her father's death, and Mr. Manners had died in June. She had written back to him then, a discreet and modest letter enough, telling him of how Mr. Simpson had read mass over the body before it was taken down to Derby

for the burying; and telling him, too, of her mother's rheumatics that kept her abed now three parts of the year. For the rest, the letters were dull enough reading to one who did not understand them: the news the lad had to give was of a kind that must be disguised, lest the letters should fall into other hands, since it concerned the coming and going of priests whose names must not appear. Yet, for all that, the letters were laid up in a press, and the heap grew slowly.

It was Mr. Anthony Babington who was come now to see her, and it was his third visit since the summer. But she knew well enough what he was come for, since his young wife, whom he had married last year, was no use to him in such matters: she had lately had a child, too, and lived quietly at Dethick with her women. His letters, too, would come at intervals, carried by a rider, or sometimes some farmer's man on his way home from Derby, and these letters, too, held dull reading enough for such as were not in the secret. Yet the magistrates at Derby would have given a good sum if they could have intercepted and understood them.

It was in the upper parlour now that she received him. A fire was burning there, as it had burned so long ago, when Robin found her fresh from her linen, and Anthony sat down in the same place. She sat by the window, with the paper in her hands at which she had been writing when she first saw him.

He had news for her, of two kinds, and, like a man, gave her first that which she least wished to hear. (She had first showed him the paper.)

"That was the very matter I was come about," he said. "You have only a few of the names, I see. Now

the rest will be over before Christmas, and will all be in London together."

"Can you not give me the names?" she said.

"I could give you the names, certainly. And I will do so before I leave; I have them here. But—Mistress Marjorie, could you not come to London with me? It would ease the case very much."

"Why, I could not," she said. "My mother—— And what good would it serve?"

"This is how the matter stands," said Anthony, crossing his legs. "We have a dozen priests coming all together—at least, they will not travel together, of course; but they will all reach London before Christmas, and there they will hold counsel as to who shall go to the districts. Eight of them, I have no doubt, will come to the north. There are as many priests in the south as are safe at the present time—or as are needed. Now if you were to come with me, mistress—with a serving-maid, and my sister would be with us—we could meet these priests, and speak with them, and make their acquaintance. That would remove a great deal of danger. We must not have that affair again which fell out last month."

Marjorie nodded slowly. (It was wonderful how her gravity had grown on her these last two years.)

She knew well enough what he meant. It was the affair of the clerk who had come from Derby on a matter connected with her father's will about the time she was looking for the arrival of a strange priest, and who had been so mistaken by her. Fortunately he had been a well-disposed man, with Catholic sympathies, or grave trouble might have followed. But this proposal

of a visit to London seemed to her impossible. She had never been to London in her life; it appeared to her as might a voyage to the moon. Derby seemed oppressingly large and noisy and dangerous; and Derby, she understood, was scarcely more than a village compared to London.

"I could not do it," she said presently. "I could not leave my mother."

Anthony explained further.

It was evident that Booth's Edge was becoming more and more a harbour for priests, owing largely to Mistress Marjorie's courage and piety. It was well placed; it was remote; and it had so far avoided all suspicion. Padley certainly served for many, but Padley was nearer the main road; and besides, had fallen under the misfortune of losing its master for the very crime of recusancy. It seemed to be all important, therefore, that the ruling mistress of Booth's Edge, since there was no master, should meet as many priests as possible, in order that she might both know and be known by them; and here was such an opportunity as would not easily occur again. Here were a dozen priests, all to be together at one time; and of these, at least two-thirds would be soon in the north. How convenient, therefore, it would be if their future hostess could but meet them, learn their plans, and perhaps aid them by her counsel.

But she shook her head resolutely.

"I cannot do it," she said.

Anthony made a little gesture of resignation. But, indeed, he had scarcely hoped to persuade her. He knew it was a formidable thing to ask of a country-bred maid.

"Then we must do as well as we can," he said. "In any case, I must go. There is a priest I have to meet in any case; he is returning as soon as he has bestowed the rest."

"Yes?"

"His name is Ballard. He is known as Fortescue, and passes himself off as a captain. You would never know him for a priest."

"He is returning, you say?"

A shade of embarrassment passed over the young man's face, and Marjorie saw that there was something behind which she was not to know.

"Yes," he said, "I have business with him. He is not to come over on the mission yet, but only to bring the others and see them safe——"

He broke off suddenly.

"Why, I was forgetting," he cried. "Our Robin is coming too. I had a letter from him, and another for you."

He searched in the breast of his coat, and did not see the sudden rigidity that fell on the girl. For a moment she sat perfectly still; her heart had leapt to her throat, it seemed, and was hammering there. . . . But by the time he had found the letter she was herself again.

"Here it is," he said.

She took it; but made no movement to open it.

"But he is not to be a priest for five years yet?" she said quietly.

"No; but they send them sometimes as servants and such like, to make a party seem what it is not, as well as to learn how to avoid her Grace's servants. He will

go back with Mr. Ballard, I think, after three or four weeks. You have had letters from him, you told me?"

She nodded.

"Yes; but he said nothing of it, but only how much he longed to see England again."

"He could not. It has only just been arranged. He has asked to go."

There was a silence for a moment. But Anthony did not understand what it meant. He had known nothing of the affair of his friend and this girl, and he looked upon them merely as a pair of acquaintances, above all, when he had heard of Robin's determination to go to Rheims. Even the girl saw that he knew nothing, in spite of her embarrassment, and the thought that had come to her when she had heard of Robin's coming to London grew on her every moment. But she thought she must gain time.

She stood up.

"You would like to see his letters?" she asked. "I will bring them."

And she slipped out of the room.

II.

Anthony Babington sat still, staring up at Icarus in the chariot of the Sun, with something of a moody look on his face.

It was true that he was sincere and active enough in all that he did up here in the north for the priests of his faith; indeed, he risked both property and liberty on their behalf, and was willing to continue doing so as

long as these were left to him. But it seemed to him sometimes that too much was done by spiritual ways and too little by temporal. Certainly the priesthood and the mass were instruments—and, indeed, the highest instruments in God's hand; it was necessary to pray and receive the sacraments, and to run every risk in life for these purposes. Yet it appeared to him that the highest instruments were not always the best for such rough work.

It was now over two years ago since the thought had first come to him, and since that time he had spared no effort to shape a certain other weapon, which, he thought, would do the business straight and clean. Yet how difficult it had been to raise any feeling on the point. At first he had spoken almost freely to this or that Catholic whom he could trust; he had endeavoured to win even Robin; and yet, with hardly an exception, all had drawn back and bidden him be content with a spiritual warfare. One priest, indeed, had gone so far as to tell him that he was on dangerous ground . . . and the one and single man who up to the present had seemed on his side, was the very man, Mr. Ballard, then a layman, whom he had met by chance in London, and who had been the occasion of first suggesting any such idea. It was, in fact, for the sake of meeting Ballard again that he was going to London; and, he had almost thought from his friend's last letter, it had seemed that it was for the sake of meeting him that Mr. Ballard was coming across once more.

So the young man sat, with that moody look on his face, until Marjorie came back, wondering what news he would have from Mr. Ballard, and whether the plan, at

present only half conceived, was to go forward or be dropped. He was willing enough, as has been said, to work for priests, and he had been perfectly sincere in his begging Marjorie to come with him for that very purpose; but there was another work which he thought still more urgent. . . . However, that was not to be Marjorie's affair. . . . It was work for men only.

"Here they are," she said, holding out the packet. He took them and thanked her.

"I may read them at my leisure? I may take them with me?"

She had not meant that, but there was no help for it now.

"Why, yes, if you wish," she said. "Stay; let me show you which they are. You may not wish to take them all."

The letters that the two looked over together in that wainscoted parlour at Booth's Edge lie now in an iron case in a certain muniment-room. They are yellow now, and the ink is faded to a pale dusky red; and they must not be roughly unfolded lest they should crack at the creases. But they were fresh then, written on stout white paper, each occupying one side of a sheet that was then folded three or four times, sealed, and inscribed to "Mistress Marjorie Manners" in the middle, with the word "Haste" in the lower corner. The lines of writing run close together, and the flourishes on one line interweave now and again with the tails on the next.

The first was written within a week of Robin's coming to Rheims, and told the tale of the sailing, the long

rides that followed it, the pleasure the writer found at coming to a Catholic country, and something of his adventures upon his arrival with his little party. But names and places were scrupulously omitted. Dr. Allen was described as "my host"; and, in more than one instance, the name of a town was inscribed with a line drawn beneath it to indicate that this was a kind of *alias*.

The second letter gave some account of the life lived in Rheims—was a real boy's letter,—and this was more difficult to treat with discretion. It related that studies occupied a certain part of the day; that "prayers" were held at such and such times, and that the sports consisted chiefly of a game called "Cat."

So with the eight or nine that followed. The third and fourth were bolder, and spoke of certain definitely Catholic practices—of prayers for the conversion of England, and of mass said on certain days for the same intention. It seemed as if the writer had grown confident in his place of security. But later, again, his caution returned to him, and he spoke in terms so veiled that even Marjorie could scarcely understand him. Yet, on the whole, the letters, if they had fallen into hostile hands, would have done no irreparable injury; they would only have indicated that a Catholic living abroad, in some unnamed university or college, was writing an account of his life to a Catholic named Mistress Marjorie Manners, living in England.

When the girl had finished her explaining, it was evident that there was no longer any need for Anthony to take them with him. He said so.

"Ah! but take them, if you will," cried the girl.

"It would be better not. You have them safe here. And——"

Marjorie flushed. She felt that her ruse had been too plain.

"I would sooner you took them," she said. "You can read them at your leisure."

So he accepted, and slipped them into his breast with what seemed to the girl a lamentable carelessness. Then he stood up.

"I must go," he said. "And I have never asked after Mistress Manners."

"She is abed," said the girl. "She has been there this past month now."

She went with him to the door, for it was not until then that she was courageous enough to speak as she had determined.

"Mr. Babington," she said suddenly.

He turned.

"I have been thinking while we talked," she said. "You think my coming to London would be of real service?"

"I think so. It would be good for you to meet these priests before they——"

"Then I will come, if my mother gives me leave. When will you go?"

"We should be riding in not less than a week from now. But, mistress——"

"No, I have thought of it. I will come—if my mother gives me leave."

He nodded briskly and brightly. He loved courage,

and he understood that this decision of hers had required courage.

"Then my sister shall come for you, and——"

"No, Mr. Babington, there is no need. We shall start from Derby?"

"Why, yes."

"Then my maid and I will ride down there and sleep at the inn, and be ready for you on the day that you appoint."

When he was gone at last she went back again to the parlour, and sat without moving and without seeing. She was in an agony lest she had been unmaidenly in determining to go so soon as she heard that Robin was to be there.

CHAPTER II.

I.

ANTHONY lifted his whip and pointed.

"London," he said.

Marjorie nodded; she was too tired to speak.

The journey had taken them some ten days, by easy stages; each night they had slept at an inn, except once, when they stayed with friends of the Babingtons and had heard mass. They had had the small and usual adventures: a horse had fallen lame; a baggage-horse had bolted; they had passed two or three hunting-parties; they had been stared at in villages and saluted, and stared at and not saluted. Rain had fallen; the clouds had cleared again; and the clouds had gathered once more and rain had again fallen. The sun, morning by morning, had stood on the left, and evening by evening gone down again on the right.

They were a small party for so long a journey—the three, with four servants—two men and two maids: the men had ridden armed, as the custom was; one rode in front, then came the two ladies with Anthony; then the two maids, and behind them the second man. In towns and villages they closed up together lest they

should be separated, and then spread out once more as the long, straight track lengthened before them. Anthony and the two men-servants carried each a case of dags or pistols at the saddle-bow, for fear of highway-men. But none had troubled them.

A strange dreamlike mood had come down on Marjorie. At times it seemed to her in her fatigue as if she had done nothing all her life but ride; at times, as she sat rocking, she was living still at home, sitting in the parlour, watching her mother; the illusion was so clear and continuous that its departure, when her horse stumbled or a companion spoke, was as an awaking from a dream. At other times she looked about her; talked; asked questions.

She found Mistress Alice Babington a pleasant friend, some ten years older than herself, who knew London well, and had plenty to tell her. She was a fair woman, well built and active; very fond of her brother, whom she treated almost as a mother treats a son; but she seemed not to be in his confidence, and even not to wish to be; she thought more of his comfort than of his ideals. She was a Catholic, of course, but of the quiet, assured kind, and seemed unable to believe that anyone could seriously be anything else; she seemed completely confident that the present distress was a passing one, and that when politics had run their course, would presently disappear. Marjorie found her as comfortable as a pillow, when she was low enough to rest on her. . . .

Though Marjorie had nodded only when the spires of London shone up suddenly in the evening light, a

sharp internal interest awakened in her. It was as astonishing as a miracle that the end should be in sight; the past ten days had made it seem to her as if all things which she desired must eternally recede. . . . She touched her horse unconsciously, and stared out between his ears, sitting upright and alert again.

It was not a great deal that met the eye, but it was so disposed as to suggest a great deal more. Far away to the right lay a faint haze, and in it appeared towers and spires, with gleams of sharp white here and there, where some tall building rose above the dark roofs. To the left again appeared similar signs of another town—the same haze, towers and spires—linked to the first. She knew what they were; she had heard half a dozen times already of the two towns that made London—running continuously in one long line, however, which grew thin by St. Mary's Hospital and St. Martin's, she was told—the two troops of houses and churches that had grown up about the two centres of Court and City, Westminster and the City itself. But it was none the less startling to see these with her proper eyes.

Presently, in spite of herself, as she saw the spire of St. Clement's Dane, where she was told they must turn Citywards, she began to talk, and Anthony to answer.

II.

Dark was beginning to fall and the lamps to be lighted as they rode in at last half an hour later, across

the Fleet Ditch, through Ludgate and turned up towards Cheapside. They were to stay at an inn where Anthony was accustomed to lodge when he was not with friends—an inn, too, of which the landlord was in sympathy with the old ways, and where friends could come and go without suspicion. It was here, perhaps, that letters would be waiting for them from Rheims.

Marjorie had known Derby only among the greater towns, and neither this nor the towns where she had stayed, night by night, during the journey, had prepared her in the least for the amazing rush and splendour of the City itself. A fine, cold rain was falling, and this, she was told, had driven half the inhabitants within doors; but even so, it appeared to her that London was far beyond her imaginings. Beneath here, in the deep and narrow channel of houses up which they rode, narrowed yet further by the rows of stalls that were ranged along the pathways on either side, the lamps were kindling swiftly, in windows as well as in the street; here and there hung great flaring torches, and the vast eaves and walls overhead shone in the light of the fires where the rich gilding threw it back. Beyond them again, solemn and towering, leaned over the enormous roofs; and everywhere, it seemed to her fresh from the silence and solitude of the country, countless hundreds of moving faces were turned up to her, from doorways and windows, as well as from the groups that hurried along under the shelter of the walls; and the air was full of talking and laughter and footsteps. It meant nothing to her at present, except inextricable confusion: the gleam of arms as a patrol passed by; the important little group making its way with torches; the

dogs that scuffled in the roadway; the party of apprentices singing together loudly, with linked arms, plunging up a side street; the hooded women chattering together with gestures beneath a low hung roof; the calling, from side to side of the twisting street; the bargaining of the sellers at the stalls—all this, with the rattle of their own horses' feet and the jingling of the bits, combined only to make a noisy and brilliant spectacle without sense or signification.

Mistress Alice glanced at her, smiling.

"You are tired," she said; "we are nearly there. That is St. Paul's on the right."

Ah! that gave her peace. . . .

They were turning off from the main street just as her friend spoke; but she had time to catch a glimpse of what appeared at first sight a mere gulf of darkness, and then, as they turned, resolved itself into a vast and solemn pile, grey-lined against black. Lights burned far across the wide churchyard, as well as in the windows of the high houses that crowned the wall, and figures moved against the glow, tiny as dolls. . . . Then she remembered again: how God had once been worshipped there indeed, in the great house built to His honour, but was no longer so worshipped. Or, if it were the same God, as some claimed, at least the character of Him was very differently conceived. . . .

The "Red Bull" again increased her sense of rest; since all inns are alike. A curved archway opened on the narrow street; and beneath this they rode, to find themselves in a paved court, already lighted, surrounded by window-pierced walls, and high galleries to right and

left. The stamping of horses from the farther end; and, almost immediately, the appearance of a couple of hostlers, showed where the stables lay. Beside it she could see through the door of the brightly-lit bake-house.

She was terribly stiff, as she found when she limped up the three or four stairs that led up to the door of the living-part of the inn; and she was glad enough to sit down in a wide, low parlour with her friend as Mr. Babington went in search of the host. The room was lighted only by a fire leaping in the chimney; and she could make out little, except that pieces of stuff hung upon the walls, and a long row of metal vessels and plates were ranged in a rack between the windows.

"It is a quiet inn," said Alice. Marjorie nodded again. She was too tired to speak; and almost immediately Anthony came back, with a tall, clean-shaven, middle-aged man, in an apron, following behind.

"It is all well," he said. "We can have our rooms and the parlour complete. These are the ladies," he added.

The landlord bowed a little, with a dignity beyond that of his dress.

"Supper shall be served immediately, madam," he said, with a tactful impartiality towards them both.

They were indeed very pleasant rooms; and, as Anthony had described them to her, were situated towards the back of the long, low house, on the first floor, with a private staircase leading straight up from the yard to the parlour itself. The sleeping-rooms, too, opened upon the parlour; that which the two ladies were to occupy was farthest from the yard, for quietness' sake; that in

which Anthony and his man would sleep, upon the other side. The windows of all three looked straight out upon a little walled garden that appeared to be the property of some other house. The rooms were plainly furnished, but had a sort of dignity about them, especially in the carved woodwork about the doors and windows. There was a fireplace in the parlour, plainly a recent addition; and a maid rose from kindling the logs and turf, as the two ladies came back after washing and changing.

A table was already laid, lit by a couple of candles: it was laid with fine napery, and the cutlery was clean and solid. Marjorie looked round the room once more; and, as she sat down, Anthony came in, still in his mud-splashed dress, carrying three or four letters in his hands.

"News," he said. . . . "I will be with you immediately," and vanished into his room.

The sense of home was deepening on Marjorie every moment. This room in which she sat, might, with a little fancy, be thought to resemble the hall at Booth's Edge. It was not so high, indeed; but the plain solidity of the walls and woodwork, the aspect of the supper-table, and the quiet, so refreshing after the noises of the day, and, above all, after the din of their mile-long ride through the City—these little things, together with the knowledge that the journey was done at last, and that her old friend Robin was, if not already come, at least soon to arrive—these little things helped to soothe and reassure her. She wondered how her mother found herself. . . .

When Anthony came back, the supper was all laid

out. He had given orders that no waiting was to be done; his own servants would do what was necessary. He had a bright and interested face, Marjorie thought; and the instant they were sat down, she knew the reason of it.

"We are just in time," he said. "These letters have been lying here for me the last week. They will be here, they tell me, by to-morrow night. But that is not all——"

He glanced round the dusky room; then he laid down the knife with which he was carving; and spoke in a yet lower voice.

"Father Campion is in the house," he said.

His sister started.

"In the house? . . . Do you mean——"

He nodded mysteriously, as he took up the knife again.

"He has been here three or four days. The rooms are full in the . . . in the usual place. And I have spoken with him; he is coming here after supper. He had already supped."

Marjorie leaned back in her chair; but she said nothing. From beneath in the house came the sound of singing, from the tavern parlour where boys were performing madrigals.

It seemed to her incredible that she should presently be speaking with the man, whose name was already affecting England as perhaps no priest's name had ever affected it. He had been in England, she knew, comparatively a short time; yet in that time, his name had

run like fire from mouth to mouth. To the minds of Protestants there was something almost diabolical about the man; he was here, he was there, he was everywhere, and yet, when the search was up, he was nowhere. Tales were told of his eloquence that increased the impression that he made a thousandfold; it was said that he could wile birds off their branches and the beasts from their lairs; and this eloquence, it was known, could be heard only by initiates, in far-off country houses, or in quiet, unsuspected places in the cities. He preached in some shrouded and locked room in London one day; and the next, thirty miles off, in a cow-shed to rustics. And his learning and his subtlety were equal to his eloquence: her Grace had heard him at Oxford years ago, before his conversion; and, it was said, would refuse him nothing, even now, if he would but be reasonable in his religion; even Canterbury, it was reported, might be his. And if he would not be reasonable—then, as was fully in accordance with what was known of her Grace, nothing was too bad for him.

Such feeling then, on the part of Protestants, found its fellow in that of the Catholics. He was their champion, as no other man could be. Had he not issued his famous “challenge” to any and all of the Protestant divines, to meet them in any argument on religion that they cared to select, in any place and at any time, if only his own safe-conduct were secure? And was it not notorious that none would meet him? He was, indeed, a fire, a smoke in the nostrils of his adversaries, a flame in the hearts of his friends. Everywhere he ranged, he and his comrade, Father Persons, sometimes in company, sometimes apart; and wherever they went

the Faith blazed up anew from its dying embers, in the lives of rustic knave and squire.

And she was to see him!

"He is here for four or five days only," went on Anthony presently, still in a low, cautious voice. "The hunt is very hot, they say. Not even the host knows who he is; or, at least, makes that he does not. He is under another name, of course; it is Mr. Edmonds, this time. He was in Essex, he tells me; but comes to the wolves' den for safety. It is safer, he says, to sit secure in the midst of the trap, than to wander about its doors; for when the doors are opened he can run out again, if no one knows he is there. . . ."

III.

When supper was finished at last, and the maids had borne away the dishes, there came almost immediately a tap upon the door; and before any could answer, there walked in a man, smiling.

He was of middle-size, dressed in a dark, gentleman's suit, carrying his feathered hat in his hand, with his sword. He appeared far younger than Marjorie had expected—scarcely more than thirty years old, of a dark and yet clear complexion, large-eyed, with a look of humour; his hair was long and brushed back; and a soft, pointed beard and moustache covered the lower part of his face. He moved briskly and assuredly, as one wholly at his ease.

"I am come to the right room?" he said. "That is as well."

His voice, too, had a ring of gaiety in it; it was low, quite clear and very sympathetic; and his manners, as Marjorie observed, were those of a cultivated gentleman, without even a trace of the priest. She would not have been astonished if she had been told that the man was of the court, or some great personage of the country. There was no trace of furtive hurry or of alarm about him; he moved deftly and confidently; and when he sat down, after the proper greetings, crossed one leg over the other, so that he could nurse his foot. It seemed more incredible even than she had thought, that this was Father Campion!

"You have pleasant rooms here, and music to cheer you, too," he said. "I understand that you are often here, Mr. Babington."

Anthony explained that he found them convenient and very secure.

"Roberts is a prudent landlord," he said.

Father Campion nodded.

"He knows his own business, which is what few landlords do, in these degenerate days; and he knows nothing at all of his guests'. In that he is even more of an exception."

His eyes twinkled delightfully at the ladies.

"And so," he said, "God blesses him in those who use his house."

They talked for a few minutes in this manner. Father Campion spoke of the high duty that lay on all country ladies to make themselves acquainted with the sights of the town; and spoke of three or four of these.

Her Grace, of course, must be seen; that was the greatest sight of all. They must make an opportunity for that; and there would surely be no difficulty, since her Grace liked nothing better than to be looked at. And they must go up the river by water, if the weather allowed, from the Tower to Westminster; not from Westminster to the Tower, since that was the way that traitors came, and no good Catholic could, even in appearance, be a traitor. And, if they pleased, he would himself be their guide for a part of their adventures. He was to lie hid, he told them; and he knew no better way to do that than to flaunt as boldly as possible in the open ways.

"If I lay in my room," said he, "with a bolt drawn, I would soon have some busy fellow knocking on the door to know what I did there. But if I could but dine with her Grace, or take an hour with Mr. Topcliffe, I should be secure for ever."

Marjorie glanced shyly towards Alice, as if to ask a question. (She was listening, it seemed to her, with every nerve in her tired body.) The priest saw the glance.

"Mr. Topcliffe, madam? Well; let us say he is a dear friend of the Lieutenant of the Tower, and has, I think, lodgings there just now. And he is even a friend of Catholics, too—to such, at least, as desire a heavenly crown."

"He is an informer and a tormentor!" broke in Anthony harshly.

"Well, sir; let us say that he is very loyal to the letter of the law; and that he presides over our Protestant bed of Procrustes."

"The——" began Marjorie, emboldened by the kindness of the priest's voice.

"The bed of Procrustes, madam, was a bed to which all who lay upon it had to be conformed. Those that were too long were made short; and those that were too short were made long. It is a pleasant classical name for the rack."

Marjorie caught her breath. But Father Campion went on smoothly.

"We shall have a clear day to-morrow, I think," he said. "If you are at liberty, sir, and these ladies are not too wearied—I have a little business in Westminster; and——"

"Why, yes," said Anthony, "for to-morrow night we expect friends. From Rheims, sir."

The priest dropped his foot and leaned forward.

"From Rheims?" he said sharply.

The other nodded.

"Eight or ten at least will arrive. Not all are priests. One is a friend of our own from Derbyshire, who will not be made priest for five years yet."

"I had not heard they were to come so soon," said Father Campion. "And what a company of them!"

"There are a few of them who have been here before. Mr. Ballard is one of them."

The priest was silent an instant.

"Mr. Ballard," he said. "Ballard! Yes; he has been here before. He travels as Captain Fortescue, does he not? You are a friend of his?"

"Yes, sir."

Father Campion made as if he would speak; but interrupted himself and was silent; and it seemed to

Marjorie as if another mood was fallen on him. And presently they were talking again of London and its sights.

IV.

In spite of her weariness, Marjorie could not sleep for an hour or two after she had gone to bed. It was an extraordinary experience to her to have fallen in, on the very night of her coming to London, with the one man whose name stood to her for all that was gallant in her faith. As she lay there, listening to the steady breathing of Alice, who knew no such tremors of romance, to the occasional stamp of a horse across the yard, and, once or twice, to voices and footsteps passing on some paved way between the houses, she rehearsed again and again to herself, the tales she had heard of him.

Now and again she thought of Robip. She wondered whether he, too, one day (and not of necessity a far-distant day, since promotion came quickly in this war of faith), would occupy some post like that which this man held so gaily and so courageously; and for the first time, perhaps, she understood not in vision merely, but in sober thought, what the life of a priest in those days signified. Certainly she had met man after man before—she had entertained them often enough in her mother's place, and had provided by her own wits for their security—men who went in peril of liberty and even of life; but here, within the walls of London, in this "wolves' den" as Father Campion had called it,

where men brushed against one another continually, and looked into a thousand faces a day, where patrols went noisily with lights and weapons, where the great Tower stood, where her Grace, the mistress of the wolves, had her dwelling—here, peril assumed another aspect, and pain and death another reality, from that which they presented on the wind-swept hills and the secret valleys of the country from which they came. . . . And it was with Father Champion himself, in his very flesh, that she had talked this evening—it was Father Champion who had given her that swift, kindly look of commendation, as Mr. Babington had spoken of her reason for coming to London, and of her hospitality to wandering priests—Father Champion, the Angel of the Church, was in England. And to-morrow Robin, too, would be here.

Then, as sleep began to come down on her tired and excited brain, and to form, as so often under such conditions, little visible images, even before the reason itself is lulled, there began to pass before her, first tiny and delicate pictures of what she had seen to-day—the low hills to the north of London, dull and dark below the heavy sky, but light immediately above the horizon as the sun sank down; the appearance of her horse's ears—those ears and that tuft of wayward mane between them of which she had grown so weary; the lighted walls of the London streets; the monstrous shadows of the eaves; the flare of lights; the moving figures—these came first; and then faces—Father Champion's, smiling, with white teeth and narrowed eyes, bright against the dark chimney-breast; Alice's serene features, framed in flaxen hair; and then, as sleep had

all but conquered her, the imagination sent up one last idea, and a face came into being before her, so formless yet so full, so sinister, so fierce and so distorted, that she drew a sudden breath and sat up, trembling. . . .

. . . Why had they spoken to her of Topcliffe? . . .

CHAPTER III.

I.

It was a soft winter's morning as the party came down the little slope towards the entrance-gate of the Tower next day. The rain last night had cleared the air, and the sun shone as through thin veils of haze, kindly and sweet. The river on the right was at high tide, and up from the water's edge came the cries of the boatmen, pleasant and invigorating.

The sense of unreality was deeper than ever on Marjorie's mind. One incredible thing after another, known to her only in the past by rumour and description, and imagined in a frame of glory, was taking shape before her eyes. . . . She was in London; she had slept in Cheapside; she had talked with Father Campion; he was with her now; this was the Tower of London that lay before her, a monstrous huddle of grey towers and battlemented walls along which passed the scarlet of a livery and the gleam of arms.

All the way that they had walked, her eyes had been about her everywhere — the eyes of a startled child, through which looked the soul of a woman. She had seen the folks go past like actors in a drama—

London merchants, apprentices, a party of soldiers, a group on horseback: she had seen a congregation pour out of the doors of some church whose name she had asked and had forgotten again; the cobbled patches of street had been a marvel to her; the endless roofs, the white and black walls, the leaning windows, the galleries where heads moved; the vast wharfs; the crowding masts, resembling a stripped forest; the rolling-gaited sailors; and, above all, the steady murmur of voices and footsteps, never ceasing, beyond which the crowing of cocks and the barking of dogs sounded far off and apart—these things combined to make a kind of miracle that all at once delighted, oppressed and bewildered her.

Here and there some personage had been pointed out to her by the trim, merry gentleman who walked by her side with his sword swinging. (Anthony went with his sister just behind, as they threaded their way through the crowded streets, and the two men-servants followed.) She saw a couple of City dignitaries in their furs, with stavesmen to clear their road; a little troop of the Queen's horse, blazing with colour, under the command of a young officer who might have come straight from Romance. But she was more absorbed—or, rather, she returned every instant to the man who walked beside her with such an air and talked so loudly and cheerfully. Certainly, it seemed to her, his disguise was perfect, and himself the best part of it. She compared him in her mind with a couple of ministers, splendid and awful in their gowns and ruffs, whom they had met turning into one of the churches just now, and smiled at the comparison; and yet perhaps

these were preachers too, and eloquent in their own fashion.

And now, here was the Tower—the end of all things, so far as London was concerned. Beyond it she saw the wide rolling hills, the bright reaches of the river, and the sparkle of Placentia, far away.

“Her Grace is at Westminster these days,” explained the priest; “she is moving to Hampton Court in a day or two; so I doubt not we shall be able to go in and see a little. We shall see, at least, the outside of the Paradise where so many holy ones have lived and died. There are three or four of them here now; but the most of them are in the Fleet or the Marshalsea.”

Marjorie glanced at him. She did not understand.

“I mean Catholic prisoners, mistress. There are several of them in ward here, but we had better speak no names.”

He wheeled suddenly as they came out into the open, and moved to the left.

“There is Tower Hill, mistress; where my lord Cardinal Fisher died, and Thomas More.”

Marjorie stopped short. But there was nothing great to see—only a rising ground, empty and bare, with a few trimmed trees; the ground was without grass; a few cobbled paths crossed this way and that.

“And here is the gateway,” he said, “whence they come out to glory. . . . And there on the right” (he swept his arm towards the river) “you may see, if you are fortunate, other criminals called pirates, hung there till they be covered by three tides.”

Still standing there, with Mr. Babington and his sister come up from behind, he began to relate the names of this tower and of that, in the great tumbled mass of buildings surmounted by the high keep. But Marjorie paid no great attention except with an effort; she was brooding rather on the amazing significance of all that she saw. It was under this gateway that the martyrs came; it was from those windows in that tower which the priest had named just now, that they had looked. . . . And this was Father Campion. She turned and watched him as he talked. He was dressed as he had been dressed last night, but with a small cloak thrown over his shoulders; he gesticulated freely and easily, pointing out this and that; now and again his eyes met hers, and there was nothing but a grave merriment in them. . . . Only once or twice his voice softened, as he spoke of those great ones that had shown Catholics how both to die and live.

"And now," he said, "with your permission I will go and speak to the guard, and see if we may have entrance."

It was almost with terror that she saw him go—a solitary man, with a price on his head, straight up to those whose business it was to catch him—armed men, as she could see—she could even see the quilted jacks they wore—who, it may be, had talked of him in the guard-room only last night. But his air was so assured and so magnificent that even she began to understand how complete such a disguise might be; and she watched him speaking with the officer with a touch even

of his own humour in her heart. Indeed, there was some truth in the charge of Jesuitry, after all!

Then the figure turned and beckoned, and they went forward.

II.

A certain horror, in spite of herself and her company, fell on her as she passed beneath the solid stone vaulting, passed along beneath the towering wall, turned up from the water-gate, and came out into the wide court round which the Lieutenant's lodgings, the little church, and the enormous White Tower itself are grouped. There was a space, not enclosed in any way, but situated within a web of paths, not far from the church, that caught her attention. She stood looking at it.

"Yes, mistress," said the priest behind her. "That is the place of execution for those who die within the Tower—those usually of royal blood. My Lady Salisbury died there, and my Lady Jane Grey, and others."

He laid his hand gently on her arm.

"You must not look so grave," he said, "you must gape more. You are a country-cousin, madam."

And she smiled in spite of herself, as she met his eyes.

"Tell me everything," she said.

They went together nearer to the church, and faced about.

"We can see better from here," he said.

Then he began.

First there was the Lieutenant's lodging on the right. They must look well at that. Interviews had taken place there that had made history. (He mentioned a few names.) Then, farther down on the right, beyond that corner round which they had come just now, was the famous water-gate, called "Traitors' Gate," through which passed those convicted of treason at Westminster, or, at least, those who were under grave suspicion. Such as these came, of course, by water, as prisoners on whose behalf a demonstration might perhaps be made if they came by land. So, at least, he understood was the reason of the custom.

"Her Grace herself once came that way," he said with a twinkle. "Now she sends other folks in her stead."

Then he pointed out more clearly the White Tower. It was there that the Council sat on affairs of importance.

"And it is there——" began Anthony harshly.

The priest turned to him, suddenly grave, as if in reproof.

"Yes," he said softly. "It is there that the passion of the martyrs begins."

Marjorie turned sharply.

"You mean——"

"Well," he said, "it is there that the Council sits to examine prisoners both before and after the Question. They are taken downstairs to the Question, and brought back again after it. It was there that——"

He broke off.

"Who is this?" he said.

The court had been empty while they talked except that on the far side, beneath the towering cliff of the

keep, a sentry went to and fro. But now another man had come into view, walking up from the way they themselves had come; and it would appear from the direction he took that he would pass within twenty or thirty yards of them. He was a tall man, dressed in sad-coloured clothes, with a felt hat on his head and the usual sword by his side. He was plainly something of a personage, for he walked easily and confidently. He was still some distance off; but it was possible to make out that he was sallowish in complexion, wore a trimmed beard, and had something of a long throat.

Father Campion stared at him a moment, and, as he stared, Marjorie heard Mr. Babington utter a sudden exclamation. Then the priest, with one quick glance at him, murmured something which Marjorie could not hear, and walked briskly off to meet the stranger.

"Come," said Anthony in a sharp, low voice, "we must see the church."

"Who is it?" whispered Mistress Alice, with even her serene face a little troubled.

For the first moment, as they walked towards the entrance of the church, Anthony said nothing. Then as they reached it, he said, in a tone quite low and yet full of suppressed passion of some kind, a name that Marjorie could not catch.

She turned before they went in, and looked again.

The priest was talking to the stranger, and was making gestures, as if asking for direction.

"Who is it, Mr. Babington?" she asked again as they went in. "I did not——"

"Topcliffe," said Anthony.

III.

The horror was still on the girl, as they went, an hour later, up the ebbing tide towards Westminster, in a boat rowed by a waterman and one of their own servants. About them was a scene, of which the very thought, a month ago, would have absorbed and fascinated her. They had scarcely passed through London Bridge—finding themselves just in time before the fall of the water would have hindered their passage, leaving out of sight the grey sunlit heap of buildings from which they had come. All about them the river was gay with shipping. Wherries, like clumsy water-beetles, lurched along out of the current, or slipped out suddenly to make their way across from one stairs to another; a great barge, coming down-stream, grew larger every instant, its prow bright with gilding, and the throb of the twelve oars in the row-locks coming to them like the grunting of a beast. On either side of the broad stream rose the houses and the churches, those on this side visible down to their shining window-panes in the sunlight, and the very texture of their tiled roofs; those on the other a mere huddle of countless walls and gables, in the shadow; and between them showed the leafless trees, stretches of green meadow, across which moved tiny figures, and the brown flats of the marshes beyond, broken here and there by outlying villages a mile or two away. Behind them now towered the great buildings on London Bridge—the chapel, the houses, the old gateway on the south end, above which the impaled heads of traitors stood out against the bright sky. It

was a tolerable crop just now, the priest had said, bitterly smiling. But, above all else, as the boat moved up, Marjorie kept her eyes fixed on far-off Westminster, on the grey towers and the white walls where Elizabeth reigned and Saint Edward slept; while within her mind, clear as a picture, she saw still the empty court, as she had seen it when the priest fetched them out again from the church—empty at last of the hateful presence which he had faced so confidently.

“It appeared to me best to speak with him openly,” said the priest quietly, as they had waited ten minutes later on the wharf outside the Tower, while the men ran to make ready their boat. “I do not know why, but I suppose I am one of those who better like their danger in front than behind. I knew him at once; I have had him pointed out to me two or three times before. So I looked him in the eyes, and asked him whether some ladies from the country might be permitted to see the White Tower, and to whom we had best apply. He told me that was not his affair, and looked me up and down as he said it. And then he went his way to . . . the White Tower, where I doubt not he had business.”

“He said no more?” asked Anthony.

“No, he said no more. But I shall know him again better next time, and he me.”

It seemed of evil omen to the girl that she should have had such an encounter on the day that Robin came back. Like all persons who dwell much in the country, a world that was neither that of the flesh nor yet of the spirit was that in which she largely moved—

a world of strange laws, and auspices, and this answering to this and that to that. It is a state inconceivable to those who live in the noise and movement of town—who find town-life, that is, the life in which they are most at ease. For where men have made the earth that is trodden underfoot, and have largely veiled the heavens themselves, it is but natural that they should think that they have made everything, and that it is they who rule it.

As they drew nearer Westminster then, it was with Marjorie as it had been when they came to the Tower. The priest was busy pointing out this or that building—the Palace towers, the Hall, the Abbey behind, and St. Margaret's Church, as well as the smaller buildings of the Court, and the little town that lay round about. But she listened as she listened to the noise that came from the streets clear across the water, attending to it, yet scarcely distinguishing one thing from another, and forgetting each as soon as she heard it. She was thinking all the while of Robin, and of the man whose face she had seen, of his beard and his long throat. Well, at least, Robin was not yet a priest. . . .

The boat was already nearing the King's Stairs at Westminster, when a new event happened that for awhile distracted her.

The first they saw of it was the sight of a number of men and women running in a disorderly mob, calling out as they ran, along the river-bank in the direction from Charing Old Cross towards Palace Yard. They appeared excited, but not by fear; and it was plain that something was taking place of which they wished to

have a sight. As the priest stood up in the boat in order to have a clearer sight of what lay above the bank, three or four trumpet-calls of a peculiar melody, rang out clear and distinct, echoed back by the walls round about, plainly audible above the rising noise of a crowd that, it seemed, must be gathering out of sight. The priest sat down again and his face was merry.

"You have come on a fortunate day, mistress," he said to Marjorie. "First Topcliffe, and now her Grace; if we make haste we may see her pass by."

"Her Grace?"

"She will be going to dinner in Whitehall, after having taken the air by the river. They will be passing the Abbey now. But she will not be in her supreme state; I am sorry for that."

As they rowed in quickly over the last hundred yards that lay between them and the stairs, Marjorie listened to the priest as he described something of what the "supreme state" signified. He spoke of the long lines of carriages, filled with the ladies and the infirm, preceded by the pikemen, and the gentlemen pensioners carrying wands, and the knights followed by the heralds. Behind these, he said, came the officers of State immediately before the Queen's carriage, and after her the guards of her person.

"But this will be but a tame affair," he said. "I wish you could have seen a Progress, with the arches and the speeches and the declamations, and the heathen gods and goddesses that reign round our Eliza, when she will go to Ashridge or Havering. I have heard it said——"

And then the prow of the boat, turned deftly at the last instant, grated along the lowest stair, and the waterman was out to steady his craft.

IV.

It was the very crown and summit of new sensation that Marjorie attained as she stood in an open gallery that looked onto the road from Westminster to Whitehall. Father Campion, speaking of a "good friend" of his that had his lodgings there, led them by a short turning or two, that avoided the crowd, straight to the door of what appeared to Marjorie a mere warren of rooms, stairs and passages. A grave little man, with a pen behind his ear, ran out upon their knocking at one of these doors, and led them straight through, smiling and talking, out into this very gallery where they now stood; and then vanished again.

The gallery was such as those which Marjorie had noted on the way to the Tower; a high-hung, airy place, running the length of the house, contrived on the level of the second floor, with the first floor roof beneath and overhanging attics above. It was supported on massive oak beams, and protected from the street by a low balustrade of a height to lean the elbows upon it. It was on this balustrade that Marjorie leaned, looking down into the street.

To the left the narrow roadway curved off out of sight in the direction of Palace Yard; on the right she could make out, a hundred yards away, some kind of a gateway, that strode across the street, and gave access,

she supposed, to the Palace. Opposite, the windows were filled with faces, and an enthusiastic loyalist was leaning, red-faced and vociferous, calling to a friend in the crowd beneath, from a gallery corresponding to that from which the girl was looking.

Of the procession nothing was at present to be seen. They had caught a glimpse of colour somewhere to the east of the abbey as they turned off opposite Westminster Hall; and already the cry of the trumpets and the increasing noise of a crowd out of sight, told the listeners that they would not have long to wait.

Beneath, the crowd was arranging itself with admirable discipline, dispersing in long lines two or three deep against the walls, so as to leave a good space, and laughing good-humouredly at a couple of officious persons in livery who had suddenly made their appearance. And then, as the country girl herself smiled down, an exclamation from Alice made her turn.

At first it was difficult to discern anything clearly in the stream whose head began to discharge itself round the curve from the left. A row of brightly-coloured uniforms, moving four abreast, came first, visible above the tossing heads of horses. Then followed a group of guards, whose steel caps passed suddenly into the sunlight that caught them from between the houses, and went again into shadow.

And then at last, she caught a glimpse of the carriage, followed by ladies on grey horses; and forgot all the rest.

This way and that she craned her head, gripping the oak post by which she leaned, unconscious of all except

that she was to see her in whom England itself seemed to have been incarnated—the woman who, as perhaps no other earthly sovereign in the world at that time, or before her, had her people in a grasp that was not one of merely regal power. Even far away in Derbyshire—even in the little country manor from which the girl came, the aroma of that tremendous presence penetrated—of the woman whom men loved to hail as the Virgin Queen, even though they might question her virginity; the woman—“our Eliza,” as the priest had named her just now—who had made so shrewd an act of faith in her people that they had responded with an unreserved act of love. It was this woman, then, whom she was about to see; the sister of Mary and Edward, the daughter of Henry and Anne Boleyn, who had received her kingdom Catholic, and by her own mere might had chosen to make it Protestant; the woman whose anointed hands were already red in the blood of God’s servants, yet hands which men fainted as they kissed. . . .

Then on a sudden, as Elizabeth lifted her head this side and that, the girl saw her.

She was sitting in a low carriage, raised on cushions, alone. Four tall horses drew her at a slow trot: the wheels of the carriage were deep in mud, since she had driven for an hour over the deep December roads; but this added rather to the splendour within. But of this Marjorie remembered no more than an uncertain glimpse. The air was thick with cries; from window after window waved hands; and, more than all, the loyalty was real, and filled the air like brave music.

There, then, she sat, smiling.

She was dressed in some splendid stuff; jewels sparkled beneath her throat. Once a hand in an embroidered glove rose to wave an answer to the roar of salute; and, as the carriage came beneath, she raised her face.

It was a thin face, sharply pear-shaped, ending in a pointed chin; a tight mouth smiled at the corners; above her narrow eyes and high brows rose a high forehead, surmounted by strands of auburn hair drawn back tightly beneath the little head-dress. It was a strangely peaked face, very clear-skinned, and resembled in some manner a mask. But the look of it was as sharp as steel; like a slender rapier, fragile and thin, yet keen enough to run a man through. The power of it, in a word, was out of all measure with the slightness of the face. . . . Then the face dropped; and Marjorie watched the back of the head bending this way and that, till the nodding heads that followed hid it from sight.

Marjorie drew a deep breath and turned. The faces of her friends were as pale and intent as her own. Only the priest was as easy as ever.

"So that is our Eliza," he said.

Then he did a strange thing.

He lifted his cap once more with grave seriousness. "God save her Grace!" he said.

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CHAPTER IV.

I.

ROBIN bowed to her very carefully, and stood upright again.

She had seen in an instant how changed he was, in that swift instant in which her eyes had singled him out from the little crowd of men that had come into the room with Anthony at their head. It was a change which she could scarcely have put into words, unless she had said that it was the conception of the Levite within his soul. He was dressed soberly and richly, with a sword at his side, in great riding-boots splashed to the knees with mud, with his cloak thrown back; and he carried his great brimmed hat in his hand. All this was as it might have been in Derby, though, perhaps, his dress was a shade more dignified than that in which she had ever seen him. But the change was in his face and bearing; he bore himself like a man, and a restrained man; and there was besides that subtle air which her woman's eyes could see, but which even her woman's wit could not properly describe.

She made room for him to sit beside her; and then Father Campion's voice spoke:

"These are the gentlemen, then," he said. "And two more are not yet come. Gentlemen——" he bowed. "And which is Captain Fortescue?"

A big man, distinguished from the rest by a slightly military air, and by a certain vividness of costume and a bristling feather in his hat, bowed back to him.

"We have met once before, Mr.—Mr. Edmonds," he said. "At Valladolid."

Father Campion smiled.

"Yes, sir; for five or ten minutes; and I was in the same room with your honour once at the Duke of Guise's. . . . And now, sir, who are the rest of your company?"

The others were named one by one; and Marjorie eyed each of them carefully. It was her business to know them again if ever they should meet in the north; and for a few minutes the company moved here and there, bowing and saluting, and taking their seats. There were still a couple of men who were not yet come; but these two arrived a few minutes later; and it was not until she had said a word or two to them all, and Father Campion had named her and her good works, to them, that she found herself back again with Robin in a seat a little apart.

"You look very well," she said, with an admirable composure.

His eyes twinkled.

"I am as weary as a man can be," he said. "We have ridden since before dawn. . . . And you, and your good works?"

Marjorie explained, describing to him something of the system by which priests were safeguarded now in

the north—the districts into which the county was divided, and the apportioning of the responsibilities among the faithful houses. It was her business, she said, to receive messages and to pass them on; she had entertained perhaps a dozen priests since the summer; perhaps she would entertain him, too, one day, she said.

The ordeal was far lighter than she had feared it would be. There was a strong undercurrent of excitement in her heart, flushing her cheeks and sparkling in her eyes; yet never for one moment was she even tempted to forget that he was now vowed to God. It seemed to her as if she talked with him in the spirit of that place where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Those two years of quiet in the north, occupied, even more than she recognised, in the rearranging of her relations with the memory of this young man, had done their work. She still kindled at his presence; but it was at the presence of one who had undertaken an adventure that destroyed altogether her old relations with him. . . . She was enkindled even more by the sense of her own security; and, as she looked at him, by the sense of his security too. Robin was gone; here, instead, was young Mr. Audrey, seminary student, who even in a court of law could swear before God that he was not a priest, nor had been "ordained beyond the seas."

So they sat and exchanged news. She told him of the rumours of his father that had come to her from time to time; he would be a magistrate yet, it was said, so hot was his loyalty. Even her Grace, it was reported, had vowed she wished she had a thousand such

country gentlemen on whose faithfulness she could depend. And Robin gave her news of the seminary, of the hours of rising and sleeping, of the sports there; of the confessors for the faith who came and went; of Dr. Allen. He told her, too, of Mr. Garlick and Mr. Ludlam; he often had talked with them of Derbyshire, he said. It was very peaceful and very stirring, too, to sit here in the lighted parlour, and hear and give the news; while the company, gathered round Anthony and Father Campion, talked in low voices, and Mistress Babington, placid, watched them and listened. He showed her, too, Mr. Maine's beads which she had given him so long ago, hung in a little packet round his neck.

More than once, as they talked, Marjorie found herself looking at Mr. Ballard, or, as he was called here, Captain Fortescue. It was he who seemed the leader of the troop; and, indeed, as Robin told her in a whisper, that was what he was. He came and went frequently, he said; his manner and his carriage were reassuring to the suspicious; he appeared, perhaps, the last man in the world to be a priest. He was a big man, as has been said; and he had a frank assured way with him; he was leaning forward, even now, as she looked at him, and seemed laying down the law, though in what was almost a whisper. Father Campion was watching him, too, she noticed; and, what she had learned of Father Campion in the last few hours, led her to wonder whether there was not something of doubtfulness in his opinion of him.

Father Campion suddenly shook his head sharply.

"I am not of that view at all," he said. "I——"

And once more his voice sank so low as to be inaudible; as the rest leaned closer about him.

II.

Mr. Anthony Babington seemed silent and even a little displeased when, half an hour later, the visitors were all gone downstairs to supper. Three or four of them were to sleep in the house; the rest, of whom Robin was one, had Captain Fortescue's instructions as to where lodgings were prepared. But the whole company was tired out with the long ride from the coast, and would be seen no more that night.

Marjorie knew enough of the divisions of opinion among Catholics, and of Mr. Babington in particular, to have a general view as to why her companion was displeased; but more than that she did not know, nor what point in particular it was on which the argument had run. The one party—of Mr. Babington's kind—held that Catholics were, morally, in a state of war. War had been declared upon them, without justification, by the secular authorities, and physical instruments, including pursuivants and the rack, were employed against them. Then why should not they, too, employ the same kind of instruments, if they could, in return? The second party held that a religious persecution could not be held to constitute a state of war; the Apostles Peter and Paul, for example, not only did not employ the arm of flesh against the Roman Empire, but actually repudiated it. And this party further held that even the

Pope's bull, relieving Elizabeth's subjects from their allegiance, did so only in an interior sense—in such a manner that while they must still regard her personal and individual rights—such rights as any human being possessed—they were not bound to render interior loyalty to her as their Queen, and need not, for example (though they were not forbidden to do so), regard it as a duty to fight for her, in the event, let us say, of an armed invasion from Spain.

There, then, was the situation; and Mr. Anthony had, plainly, crossed swords this evening on the point.

"The Jesuit is too simple," he said suddenly, as he strode about. "I think——" He broke off.

His sister smiled upon him placidly.

"You are too hot, Anthony," she said.

The man turned sharply towards her.

"All the praying in the world," he said, "has not saved us so far. It seems to me time——"

"Perhaps our Lord would not have us saved," she said; "as you mean it."

III.

It was not until Christmas Eve that Marjorie went to St. Paul's, for all that it was so close. But the days were taken up with the visitors; a hundred matters had to be arranged; for it was decided that before the New Year all were to be dispersed. Captain Fortescue and Robin were to leave again for the Continent on the day following Christmas Day itself.

Marjorie made acquaintance during these days with

more than one meeting-place of the Catholics in London. One was a quiet little house near St. Bartholomew's-the-Great, where a widow had three or four sets of lodgings, occupied frequently by priests and by other Catholics, who were best out of sight; and it was here that mass was to be said on Christmas Day. Another was in the Spanish Embassy; and here, to her joy, she looked openly upon a chapel of her faith, and from the gallery adored her Lord in the tabernacle. But even this was accomplished with an air of uneasiness in those round her; the Spanish priest who took them in walked quickly and interrupted them before they were done, and seemed glad to see the last of them. It was explained to Marjorie that the ambassador did not wish to give causeless offence to the Protestant court.

And now, on Christmas Eve, Robin, Anthony and the two ladies entered the Cathedral as dusk was falling—first passing through the burial-ground, over the wall of which leaned the rows of houses in whose windows lights were beginning to burn.

The very dimness of the air made the enormous heights of the great church more impressive. Before them stretched the long nave, over seven hundred feet from end to end; from floor to roof the eye travelled up the bunches of slender pillars to the dark ceiling, newly restored after the fire, a hundred and fifty feet. The tall windows on either side, and the clerestory lights above, glimmered faintly in the darkening light.

But to the Catholic eyes that looked on it the desolation was more apparent than the splendour. There were plenty of people here, indeed: groups moved up and down, talking, directing themselves more and more

towards the exits, as the night was coming on and the church would be closed presently; in one aisle a man was talking aloud, as if lecturing, with a crowd of heads about him. In another a number of soberly dressed men were putting up their papers and ink on the little tables that stood in a row—this was Scriveners' Corner, she was told; from a third half a dozen persons were dejectedly moving away—these were servants that had waited to be hired. But the soul of the place was gone. When they came out into the transepts, Anthony stopped them with a gesture, while a couple of porters, carrying boxes on their heads, pushed by, on their short cut through the cathedral.

"It was there," he said, "that the altars stood."

He pointed between the pillars on either side, and there, up little raised steps, lay the floors of the chapels. But within all was empty, except for a tomb or two, some tattered colours and the *piscinae* still in place. Where the altars had stood there were blank spaces of wall; piled up in one such place were rows of wooden seats set there for want of room.

Opposite the entrance to the choir, where once overhead had hung the great Rood, the four stood and looked in, through a gap which the masons were mending in the high wall that had bricked off the chancel from the nave. On either side, as of old, still rose up the towering carven stalls; the splendid pavement still shone beneath, refracting back from its surface the glimmer of light from the stained windows above; but the head of the body was gone. Somewhere, beneath the deep shadowed altar screen, they could make out an erection that might have been an altar, only they

knew that it was not. It was no longer the Stone of Sacrifice, whence the smoke of the mystical Calvary ascended day by day: it was the table, and no more, where bread and wine were eaten and drunk in memory of an event whose deathless energy had ceased, in this place, at least, to operate. Yet it was here, thought Marjorie, that only forty years ago, scarcely more than twenty years before she was born, on this very Night, the great church had hummed and vibrated with life. Round all the walls had sat priests, each in his place; and beside each kneeled a penitent, making ready for the joy of Bethlehem once again—wise and simple—Shepherds and Magi—yet all simple before the baffling and entrancing Mystery. There had been footsteps and voices there too—yet of men who were busy upon their Father's affairs in their Father's house, and not upon their own. They were going from altar to altar, speaking with their Friends at Court; and here, opposite where she stood and peeped in the empty cold darkness, there had burned lights before the Throne of Him Who had made Heaven and earth, and did His Father's Will on earth as it was done in Heaven. . . . Forty years ago the life of this church was rising on this very night, with a hum as of an approaching multitude, from hour to hour, brightening and quickening as it came, up to the glory of the Midnight Mass, the crowded church, alight from end to end, the smell of box and bay in the air, soon to be met and crowned by the savour of incense-smoke; and the world of spirit, too, quickened about them; and the angels (she thought) came down from Heaven, as men up from the City round about, to greet Him who is King of both angels and men.

And now, in this new England, the church, empty of the Divine Presence, was emptying, too, of its human visitors. She could hear great doors somewhere crash together, and the reverberation roll beneath the stone vaulting. It would empty soon, desolate and dark; and so it would be all night. . . . Why did not the very stones cry out?

Mistress Alice touched her on the arm.

"We must be going," she said. "They are closing the church."

IV.

She had a long talk with Robin on Christmas night.

The day had passed, making strange impressions on her, which she could not understand. Partly it was the contrast between the homely associations of the Feast, begun, as it was for her, with the mass before dawn—the room at the top of the widow's house was crowded all the while she was there—between these associations and the unfamiliarity of the place. She had felt curiously apart from all that she saw that day in the streets—the patrolling groups, the singers, the monstrous-headed mummers (of whom companies went about all day), two or three glimpses of important City festivities, the garlands that decorated many of the houses. It seemed to her as a shadow-show without sense or meaning, since the heart of Christmas was gone. Partly, too, no doubt, it was the memory of a former Christmas, three years ago, when she had begun to understand that Robin loved her. And he was with her again; yet all

that he had stood for, to her, was gone, and another significance has taken its place. He was nearer to her heart, in one manner, though utterly removed, in another. It was as when a friend was dead: his familiar presence is gone; but now that one physical barrier is vanished, his presence is there, closer than ever, though in another fashion. . . .

Robin had come in to sup. Captain Fortescue would fetch him about nine o'clock, and the two were to ride for the coast before dawn.

The four sat quiet after supper, speaking in subdued voices, of hopes for the future, when England should be besieged, indeed, by the spiritual forces that were gathering overseas; but they slipped gradually into talk of the past, and of Derbyshire, and of rides they remembered. Then, after awhile, Anthony was called away; Mistress Alice moved back to the table to see her needlework the better, and Robin and Marjorie sat together by the fire.

He told her again of the journey from Rheims, of the inns where they lodged, of the extraordinary care that was taken, even in that Catholic land, that no rumour of the nature of the party should slip out, lest some gossip should precede them or even follow them to the coast of England. They carried themselves even there, he said, as ordinary gentlemen travelling together; two of them were supposed to be lawyers; he himself passed as Mr. Ballard's servant. They heard mass when they could in the larger towns, but even then not all together.

The landing in England had been easier, he said, than he had thought, though he had learned afterwards that a helpful young man, who had offered to show him to an inn in Folkestone, and in whose presence Mr. Ballard had taken care to give him a good rating for dropping a bag—with loud oaths—was a well-known informer. However, no harm was done: Mr. Ballard's admirable bearing, and his oaths in particular, had seemed to satisfy the young man, and he had troubled them no more.

Marjorie did not say much. She listened with a fierce attention, so much interested that she was scarcely aware of her own interest; she looked up, half betrayed into annoyance, when a placid laugh from Mistress Alice at the table showed that another was listening too.

She too, then, had to give her news, and to receive messages for the Derbyshire folk whom Robin wished to greet; and it was not until Mistress Alice slipped out of the room that she uttered a word of what she had been hoping all day she might have an opportunity to say.

"Mr. Audrey," she said (for she was careful to use this form of address), "I wish you to pray for me. I do not know what to do."

He was silent.

"At present," she said, gathering courage, "my duty is clear. I must be at home, for my mother's sake, if for nothing else. And, as I told you, I think I shall be able to do something for priests. But if my mother died——"

"Yes?" he said, as she stopped again.

She glanced up at his serious, deep-eyed face, half

in shadow and half in light, so familiar, and yet so utterly apart from the boy she had known.

"Well," she said, "I think of you as a priest already, and I can speak to you freely. . . . Well, I am not sure whether I, too, shall not go overseas, to serve God better."

"You mean——"

"Yes. A dozen or more are gone from Derbyshire, whose names I know. Some are gone to Bruges; two or three to Rome; two or three more to Spain. We women cannot do what priests can, but, at least, we can serve God in Religion."

She looked at him again, expecting an answer. She saw him move his head, as if to answer. Then he smiled suddenly.

"Well, however you look at me, I am not a priest. . . . You had best speak to one—Father Campion or another."

"But——"

"And I will pray for you," he said, with an air of finality.

Then Mistress Alice came back.

She never forgot, all her life long, the little scene that took place when Captain Fortescue came in with Mr. Babington, to fetch Robin away. Yet the whole of its vividness rose from its interior significance. Externally here was a quiet parlour; two ladies—for the girl afterwards seemed to see herself in the picture—stood by the fireplace; Mistress Alice still held her needlework gathered up in one hand, and her spools of

thread and a pin-cushion lay on the polished table. And the two gentlemen—for Captain Fortescue would not sit down, and Robin had risen at his entrance—the two gentlemen stood by it. They were not in their boots, for they were not to ride till morning; they appeared two ordinary gentlemen, each hat-in-hand, and Robin had his cloak across his arm. Anthony Babington stood in the shadow by the door, and, beyond him, the girl could see the face of Dick, who had come up to say good-bye again to his old master.

That was all—four men and two ladies. None raised his voice, none made a gesture. The home party spoke of the journey, and of their hopes that all would go well; the travellers, or rather the leader (for Robin spoke not one word, good or bad), said that he was sure it would be so; there was not one-tenth of the difficulty in getting out of England as of getting into it. Then, again, he said that it was late; that he had still one or two matters to arrange; that they must be out of London as soon as the gates opened. And the scene ended.

Robin bowed to the two ladies, precisely and courteously, making no difference between them, and wheeled and went out, and she saw Dick's face, too, vanish from the door, and heard the voices of the two on the stairs. Marjorie returned the salute of Mr. Ballard, longing to entreat him to take good care of the boy, yet knowing that she must not and could not.

Then he, too, was gone, with Anthony to see him downstairs; and Marjorie, without a word, went straight through to her room, fearing to trust her own voice, for

she felt that her heart was gone with them. Yet, not for one moment did even her sensitive soul distrust any more the nature of the love that she bore to the lad.

But Mistress Alice sat down again to her sewing.

CHAPTER V.

I.

MARJORIE was sitting in her mother's room, while her mother slept. She had been reading aloud from a bundle of letters—news from Rheims; but little by little she had seen sleep come down on her mother's face, and had let her voice trail away into silence. And so she sat quiet.

It seemed incredible that nearly a year had passed since her visit to London, and that Christmas was upon them again. Yet in this remote country place there was little to make time run slowly: the country-side wheeled gently through the courses of the year; the trees put on their green robes, changed them for russet and dropped them again; the dogs and the horses grew a little older, a beast died now and again, and others were born. The faces that she knew, servants and farmers, aged imperceptibly. Here and there a family moved away, and another into its place; an old man died and his son succeeded him, but the mother and sisters lived on in the house in patriarchal fashion. Priests came and went again unobserved; Marjorie went to the sacraments when she could, and said her prayers always. But letters

Come Rack! Come Rope! I.

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came more frequently than ever to the little remote manor, carried now by some farm-servant, now left by strangers, now presented as credentials; and Booth's Edge became known in that underworld of the north, which finds no record in history, as a safe place for folks in trouble for their faith. For one whole month in the summer there had been a visitor at the house—a cousin of old Mr. Manners, it was understood; and, except for the Catholics in the place, not a soul knew him for a priest, against whom the hue and cry still raged in York.

Derbyshire, indeed, had done well for the old Religion. Man after man went in these years southwards and was heard of no more, till there came back one day a gentleman riding alone, or with his servant; and it became known that one more Derbyshire man was come again to his own place to minister to God's people. Mr. Ralph Sherwine was one of them; Mr. Christopher Buxton another; and Mr. Ludlam and Mr. Garlick, it was rumoured, would not be long now. . . . And there had been a wonderful cessation of trouble, too. Not a priest had suffered since the two, the news of whose death she had heard two years ago.

Marjorie, then, sitting quiet over the fire that burned now all the winter in her mother's room, was thinking over these things.

She had had more news from London from time to time, sent on to her chiefly by Mr. Babington, though none had come to her since the summer, and she had singled out in particular all that bore upon Father Campion. There was no doubt that the hunt was hotter

every month; yet he seemed to bear a charmed life. Once he had escaped, she had heard, through the quick wit of a servant-maid, who had pushed him suddenly into a horse-pond, as the officers actually came in sight, so that he came out all mud and water-weed; and had been jeered at for a clumsy lover by the very men who were on his trail. . . . Marjorie smiled to herself as she nursed her knee over the fire, and remembered his gaiety and sharpness.

Robin, too, was never very far from her thoughts. In some manner she put the two together in her mind. She wondered whether they would ever travel together. It was her hope that her old friend might become another Campion himself some day.

A log rolled from its place in the fire, scattering sparks. She stooped to put it back, glancing first at the bed to see if her mother were disturbed; and, as she sat back again, she heard the blowing of a horse and a man's voice, fierce and low, from beyond the windows, bidding the beast hold himself up.

She was accustomed now to such arrivals. They came and went like this, often without warning; it was her business to look at any credentials they bore with them, and then, if all were well, to do what she could—whether to set them on their way, or to give them shelter. A room was set aside now, in the further wing, and called openly and freely the “priest’s room,”—so great was their security.

She got up from her seat and went out quickly on tip-toe, as she heard a door open and close beneath her in the house, running over in her mind any preparations

that she would have to make if the rider were one that needed shelter.

As she looked down the staircase, she saw a maid there, who had run out from the buttery, talking to a man whom she thought she knew. Then he lifted his face, and she saw that she was right: and that it was Mr. Babington.

She came down, reassured and smiling; but her breath caught in her throat as she saw his face. . . . She told the maid to be off and get supper ready, but he jerked his head in refusal. She saw that he could hardly speak. Then she led him into the hall, taking down the lantern that hung in the passage, and placing it on the table. But her hand shook in spite of herself.

"Tell me," she whispered.

He sat down heavily on a bench.

"It is all over," he said. "The bloody murderers! . . . They were gibbeted three days ago."

The girl drew a long, steady breath. All her heart cried "Robin."

"Who are they, Mr. Babington?"

"Why, Campion and Sherwine and Brian. They were taken a month or two ago. . . . I had heard not a word of it, and . . . and it ended three days ago."

"I . . . I do not understand."

The man struck his hand heavily on the long table against which he leaned. He appeared one flame of fury; courtesy and gentleness were all gone from him.

"They were hanged for treason, I tell you. . . . Treason! . . . Campion! . . . By God! we will give them treason if they will have it so!"

All seemed gone from Marjorie except the white,

splashed face that stared at her, lighted up by the lantern beside him, glaring from the background of darkness. It was not Robin . . . not Robin . . . yet——

The shocking agony of her face broke through the man's heart-broken fury, and he stood up quickly.

"Mistress Marjorie," he said, "forgive me. . . . I am like a madman. I am on my way from Derby, where the news came to me this afternoon. I turned aside to tell you. They say the truce, as they call it, is at an end. I came to warn you. You must be careful. I am riding for London. My men are in the valley. Mistress Marjorie——"

She waved him aside. The blood was beginning again to beat swiftly and deafeningly in her ears, and the word came back.

"I . . . I was shocked," she said; ". . . you must pardon me. . . . Is it certain?"

He tore out a bundle of papers from behind his cloak, detached one with shaking hands and thrust it before her.

She sat down and spread it on the table. But his voice broke in and interrupted her all the while.

"They were all three taken together, in the summer. . . . I . . . have been in France; my letters never reached me. . . . They were racked continually. . . . They died all together; praying for the Queen . . . at Tyburn. . . . Campion died the first. . . ."

She pushed the paper from her; the close handwriting was no more to her than black marks on the paper. She passed her hands over her forehead and eyes.

"Mistress Marjorie, you look like death. See, I will

leave the paper with you. It is from one of my friends who was there. . . .”

The door was pushed open, and the servant came in, bearing a tray.

“Set it down,” said Marjorie, as coolly as if death and horror were as far from her as an hour ago.

She nodded sharply to the maid, who went out again; then she rose and spread the food within the man’s reach. He began to eat and drink, talking all the time.

As she sat and watched him and listened, remembering afterwards, as if mechanically, all that he said, she was contemplating something else. She seemed to see Campion, not as he had been three days ago, not as he was now . . . but as she had seen him in London—alert, brisk, quick. Even the tones of his voice were with her, and the swift merry look in his eyes. . . . Somewhere on the outskirts of her thought there hung other presences: the darkness, the blood, the smoking cauldron. . . . Oh! she would have to face these presently; she would go through this night, she knew, looking at all their terror. But just now let her remember him as he had been; let her keep off all other thoughts so long as she could. . . .

II.

When she had heard the horse’s footsteps scramble down the little steep ascent in the dark, and then pass into silence on the turf beyond, she closed the outer door, barred it once more, and then went back straight

into the hall, where the lantern still burned among the plates. She dared not face her mother yet; she must learn how far she still held control of herself; for her mother must not hear the news: the apothecary from Derby who had ridden up to see her this week had been very emphatic. So the girl must be as usual. There must be no sign of discomposure. To-night, at least, she would keep her face in the shadow. But her voice? Could she control that too?

After she had sat motionless in the cold hall a minute or two, she tested herself.

"He is dead," she said softly. "He is quite dead, and so are the others. They——"

But she could not go on. Great shuddering seized on her; she shook from head to foot. . . .

Later that night Mrs. Manners awoke. She tried to move her head, but the pain was shocking, and still half asleep, she moaned aloud.

Then the curtains moved softly, and she could see that a face was looking at her.

"Margy! Is that you?"

"Yes, mother."

"Move my head; move my head. I cannot bear——"

She felt herself lifted gently and strongly. The struggle and the pain exhausted her for a minute, and she lay breathing deeply. Then the ease of the shifted position soothed her.

"I cannot see your face," she said. "Where is the light?"

The face disappeared, and immediately, through the curtains, the mother saw the light. But still she could not see the girl's face. She said so peevishly.

"It will weary your eyes. Lie still, mother, and go to sleep again."

"What time is it?"

"I do not know."

"Are you not in bed?"

"Not yet, mother."

The sick woman moaned again once or twice, but thought no more of it. And presently the deep sleep of sickness came down on her again.

They rose early in those days in England; and soon after six o'clock, as Janet had seen nothing of her young mistress, she opened the door of the sleeping-room and peeped in. . . . A minute later Marjorie's mind rose up out of black gulfs of sleep, in which, since her falling asleep an hour or two ago, she had wandered, bearing an intolerable burden, which she could neither see nor let fall, to find the rosy-streaked face of Janet, all pinched with cold, peering into her own. She sat up, wide awake, yet with all her world still swaying about her, and stared into her maid's eyes.

"What is it? What time is it?"

"It is after six, mistress. And the mistress seems uneasy. I——"

Marjorie sprang up and went to the bed.

III.

On the evening of that day her mother died.

There was no priest within reach. A couple of men had ridden out early, despatched by Marjorie within

half an hour of her awaking—to Dethick, to Hathersage, and to every spot within twenty miles where a priest might be found, with orders not to return without one. But the long day had dragged out; and when dusk was falling, still neither had come back. The country was rain-soaked and all but impassable, she learned later, across valley after valley, where the streams had risen. And nowhere could news be gained that any priest was near; for, as a further difficulty, open enquiry was not always possible, in view of the news that had come to Booth's Edge last night. The girl had understood that the embers were rising again to flame in the south; and who could tell but that a careless word might kindle the fire here, too. She had been urged by Anthony to hold herself more careful than ever, and she had been compelled to warn her messengers.

It was soon after dusk had fallen—the heavy dusk of a December day—that her mother had come back again to consciousness. She opened her eyes wearily, coming back, as Marjorie had herself that morning, from that strange realm of heavy and deathly sleep, to the pale phantom world called “life”; and agonising pain about the heart stabbed her wide awake.

“O Jesu!” she screamed.

Then she heard her daughter's voice, very steady and plain, in her ear.

“There is no priest, mother dear. Listen to me.”

“I cannot! I cannot! . . . Jesu!”

Her eyes closed again for torment, and the sweat ran down her face. The slow poison that had weighted and soaked her limbs so gradually these many months

past, was closing in at last upon her heart, and her pain was gathering to its last assault. The silent, humorous woman was changed into one twitching, uncontrolled incarnation of torture.

Then again the voice began:

"Jesu, Who didst die for love of me—upon the Cross—let me die—for love of Thee."

"Christ!" moaned the woman more softly.

"Say it in your heart, after me. There is no priest. So God will accept your sorrow instead. Now then——"

Then the old words began—the old acts of sorrow and love and faith and hope, that mother and daughter had said together, night after night, for so many years. Over and over again they came, whispered clear and sharp by the voice in her ear; and she strove to follow them. Now and again the pain closed its sharp hands upon her heart so cruelly that all that on which she strove to fix her mind, fled from her like a mist, and she moaned or screamed, or was silent with her teeth clenched upon her lip.

"My God—I am very sorry—that I have offended Thee."

"Why is there no priest? . . . Where is the priest?"

"Mother, dear, listen. I have sent for a priest . . . but none has come. You remember now? . . . You remember that priests are forbidden now——"

"Where is the priest?"

"Mother, dear. Three priests were put to death only three days ago in London—for . . . for being priests. Ask them to pray for you. . . . Say, Edmund Campion pray for me. Perhaps . . . perhaps——"

The girl's voice died away.

For, for a full minute, an extraordinary sensation rested on her. It began with a sudden shiver of the flesh, as sharp and tingling as water, dying away in long thrills amid her hair—that strange advertisement that tells the flesh that more than flesh is there, and that the world of spirit is not only present, but alive and energetic. Then, as it passed, the whole world, too, passed into silence. The curtains that shook just now hung rigid as sheets of steel; the woman in the bed lay suddenly still, then smiled with closed eyes. The pair of maids, kneeling out of sight beyond the bed, ceased to sob; and, while the seconds went by, as real as any knowledge can be in which the senses have no part, the certain knowledge deepened upon the girl who knelt, arrested in spite of herself, that a priestly presence was here indeed. . . .

Very slowly, as if lifting great weights, she raised her eyes, knowing that there, across the tumbled bed, where the darkness of the room showed between the parted curtains, the Presence was poised. Yet there was nothing there to see—no tortured, smoke-stained, throttling face—ah! that could not be—but neither was there the merry, kindly face, with large cheerful eyes and tender mouth smiling; no hand held the curtains that the face might peer in. Neither then nor at any time in all her life did Marjorie believe that she saw him; yet neither then nor in all her life did she doubt he had been there while her mother died.

Again her mother smiled—and this time she opened her eyes to the full, and there was no dismay in them, nor fear, nor disappointment; and she looked a little to

her left, where the parted curtains showed the darkness of the room. . . .

Then Marjorie closed her eyes, and laid her head on the bed where her mother's body sank back and down into the pillows. Then the girl slipped heavily to the floor, and the maids sprang up screaming.

IV.

It was not till two hours later that Mr. Simpson arrived. He had been found at last at Hathersage, only a few miles away, as one of the men, on his return ride, had made one last enquiry before coming home; and there he ran into the priest himself in the middle of the street. The priest had taken the man's horse and pushed on as well as he could through the dark, in the hopes he might yet be in time.

Marjorie came to him in the parlour downstairs. She nodded her head slowly and gravely.

"It is over," she said; and sat down.

"And there was no priest?"

She said nothing.

She was in her house-dress, with the hood drawn over her head as it was a cold night. He was amazed at her look of self-control; he had thought to find her either collapsed or strainedly tragic: he had wondered as he came how he would speak to her, how he would soothe her, and he saw there was no need.

She told him presently of the sudden turn for the worse early that morning as she herself fell asleep by the bedside; and a little of what had passed during

the day. Then she stopped short as she approached the end.

"Have you heard the news from London?" she said. "I mean, of our priests there?"

His young face grew troubled, and he knit his forehead.

"They are in ward," he said; "I heard a week ago. . . . They will banish them from England—they dare not do more!"

"It is all finished," she said quietly.

"What!"

"They were hanged at Tyburn three days ago—the three of them together!"

He drew a hissing breath, and felt the skin of his face tingle.

"You have heard that?"

"Mr. Babington came to tell me last night. He left a paper with me: I have not read it yet."

He watched her as she drew it out and put it before him. The terror was on him, as once or twice before in his journeyings, or as when the news of Mr. Nelson's death had reached him—a terror which shamed him to the heart, and which he loathed yet could not overcome. He still stared into her pale face. Then he took the paper and began to read it.

Presently he laid it down again. The sick terror was beginning to pass; or, rather, he was able to grip it; and he said a conventional word or two; he could do no more. There was no exultation in his heart; nothing but misery. And then, in despair, he left the subject.

"And you, mistress," he said, "what will you do now? Have you no aunt or friend——"

"Mistress Alice Babington once said she would come and live with me—if . . . when I needed it. I shall write to her. I do not know what else to do."

"And you will live here?"

"Why; more than ever!" she said, smiling suddenly. "I can work in earnest now."

CHAPTER VI.

I.

It was on a bright evening in the summer that Marjorie with her maid Janet, came riding down to Padley, and about the same time a young man came walking up the track that led from Derby. In fact, the young man saw the two against the sky-line and wondered who they were. Further, there was a group of four or five walking on the terrace below the house, that saw both the approaching parties, and commented upon their coming.

To be precise, there were four persons in the group on the terrace, and a man-servant who hung near. The four were Mr. John FitzHerbert, his son Thomas, his son's wife, and, in the midst, leaning on Mrs. FitzHerbert's arm, was old Sir Thomas himself, and it was for his sake that the servant was within call, for he was still very sickly after his long imprisonment, in spite of his occasional releases.

Mr. John saw the visitors first.

"Why, here is the company all arrived together," he said. "Now, if anything hung on that——" his son broke in, uneasily.

"You are sure of young Owen?" he said. "Our lives will all hang on him after this."

His father clapped him gently on the shoulder.

"Now, now!" he said. "I know him well enough, from my lord. He hath made a dozen such places in this county alone."

Mr. Thomas glanced swiftly at his uncle.

"And you have spoken with him, too, uncle?"

The old man turned his melancholy eyes on him.

"Yes; I have spoken with him," he said.

Five minutes later Marjorie was dismounted, and was with him. She greeted old Sir Thomas with particular respect; she had talked with him a year ago when he was first released that he might raise his fines; and she knew well enough that his liberty was coming to an end. In fact, he was technically a prisoner even now; and had only been allowed to come for a week or two from Sir Walter Aston's house before going back again to the Fleet.

"You are come in good time," said Sir John, smiling. "That is young Owen himself coming up the path."

There was nothing particularly noticeable about the young man who a minute later was standing before them with his cap in his hand. He was plainly of the working class; and he had over his shoulder a bag of tools. He was dusty up to the knees with his long tramp. Mr. John gave him a word of welcome; and then the whole group went slowly together back to the house, with the two men following. Sir Thomas stumbled a little going up the two or three steps into the hall.

Then they all sat down together; the servant put a big flagon and a horn tumbler beside the traveller, and went out, closing the doors.

"Now, my man," said Mr. John. "Do you eat and drink while I do the talking. I understand you are a man of your hands, and that you have business elsewhere."

"I must be in Lancashire by the end of the week, sir."

"Very well, then. We have business enough for you, God knows! This is Mistress Manners, whom you may have heard of. And after you have looked at the places we have here—you understand me?—Mistress Manners wants you at her house at Booth's Edge. . . . You have any papers?"

Owen leaned back and drew out a paper from his bag of tools.

"This is from Mr. Fenton, sir."

Mr. John glanced at the address; then he turned it over and broke the seal. He stared for a moment at the open sheet.

"Why, it is blank!" he said.

Owen smiled. He was a grave-looking lad of eighteen or nineteen years old; and his face lighted up very pleasantly.

"I have had that trick played on me before, sir, in my travels. I understand that Catholic gentlemen do so sometimes to try the fidelity of the messenger."

The other laughed out loud, throwing back his head.

"Why, that is a poor compliment!" he said. "You shall have a better one from us, I have no doubt."

Mr. Thomas leaned over the table and took the

paper. He examined it very carefully; then he handed it back. His father laughed again as he took it.

"You are very cautious, my son," he said. "But it is wise enough. . . . Well, then," he went on to the carpenter, "you are willing to do this work for us? And as for payment——"

"I ask only my food and lodging," said the lad quietly; "and enough to carry me on to the next place."

"Why——" began the other in a protest.

"No, sir; no more than that. . . ." He paused an instant. "I hope to be admitted to the Society of Jesus this year or next."

There was a pause of astonishment. And then old Sir Thomas' deep voice broke in.

"You do very well, sir. I heartily congratulate you. And I would I were twenty years younger myself. . . ."

II.

After supper that night the entire party went upstairs to the chapel.

Young Hugh Owen even already was beginning to be known among Catholics, for his extraordinary skill in constructing hiding-holes. Up to the present not much more had been attempted than little secret recesses where the vessels of the altar and the vestments might be concealed. But the young carpenter had been ingenious enough in two or three houses to which he had been called, to enlarge these so considerably that even two or three men might be sheltered in them; and, now that it seemed as if the persecution of recusants

was to break out again, the idea began to spread. Mr. John FitzHerbert while in London had heard of his skill, and had taken means to get at the young man, for his own house at Padley.

Owen was already at work when the party came upstairs. He had supped alone, and, with a servant to guide him, had made the round of the house, taking measurements in every possible place. He was seated on the floor as they came in; three or four panels lay on the ground beside him, and a heap of plaster and stones.

He looked up as they came in.

"This will take me all night, sir," he said. "And the fire must be put out below."

He explained his plan. The old hiding-place was but a poor affair; it consisted of a space large enough for only one man, and was contrived by a section of the wall having been removed, all but the outer row of stones made thin for the purpose; the entrance to it was through a tall sliding panel on the inside of the chapel. Its extreme weakness as a hiding-hole lay in the fact that anyone striking on the panel could not fail to hear how hollow it rang. This he proposed to do away with, unless, indeed, he left a small space for the altar vessels; and to construct instead a little chamber in the chimney of the hall that was built against this wall; he would contrive it so that an entrance was still from the chapel, as well as one that he would make over the hearth below; and that the smoke should be conducted round the little enclosed space, passing afterwards up the usual vent. The chamber would be large

enough, he thought, for at least two men. He explained, too, his method of deadening the hollowness of the sound if the panel were knocked upon, by placing pads of felt on struts of wood that would be set against the panel-door.

"Why, that is very shrewd!" cried Mr. John. He looked round the faces for approval.

For an hour or so, the party sat and watched him at his work; and Marjorie listened to their talk. It was of that which filled the hearts of all Catholics at this time; of the gathering storm in England, of the priests that had been executed this very year—Mr. Paine at Chelmsford, in March; Mr. Forde, Mr. Shert and Mr. Johnson, at Tyburn in May, the first of the three having been taken with Father Campion at Lyford—deaths that were followed two days later by the execution of four more—one of whom, Mr. Filbie, had also been arrested at Lyford. And there were besides a great number more in prison—Mr. Cottam, it was known, had been taken at York, scarcely a week ago, and, it was said, would certainly suffer before long.

They talked in low voices; for the shadow was on all their hearts. It had been possible almost to this very year to hope that the misery would be a passing one; but the time for hope was gone. It remained only to bear what came, to multiply priests, and, if necessary martyrs, and meantime to take such pains for protection as they could.

"He will be a clever pursuivant who finds this one out," said Mr. John.

The carpenter looked up from his work.

"But a clever one will find it," he said.
Mr. Thomas was heard to sigh.

III.

It was on the afternoon of the following day that Marjorie rode up to her house with Janet beside her, and Hugh Owen walking by her horse.

He had finished his work at Padley an hour or two after dawn—for he worked at night when he could, and had then gone to rest. But he had been waiting for her when her horses were brought, and asked if he might walk with her; he had asked it simply and easily, saying that it might save his losing his way, and time was precious to him.

Marjorie felt very much interested by this lad, for he was no more than that. In appearance he was like any of his kind, with a countryman's face, in a working-dress: she might have seen him by chance a hundred times and not known him again. But his manner was remarkable, so wholly simple and well-bred: he was courteous always, as suited his degree; but he had something of the same assurance that she had noticed so plainly in Father Campion. He talked with a plain, Northern dialect.

Presently she opened on that very point; for she could talk freely before Janet.

"Did you ever know Father Campion?" she asked.

"I have never spoken with him, mistress. I have

heard him preach. It was that which put it in my heart to join the company."

"You heard him preach?"

"Yes, mistress; three or four times in Essex and Hertfordshire. I heard him preach upon the young man who came to our Saviour."

"Tell me," she said, looking down at what she could see of his face.

"It was liker an angel than a man," he said quietly. "I could not take my eyes off him from his first word to the last. And all were the same that were there."

"Was he eloquent?"

"Aye; you might call it that. But I thought it to be the Spirit of God."

"And it was then you made up your mind to join the Society."

"There was no rest for me till I did. 'And Christ also went away sorrowful,' were his last words. And I could not bear to think that."

Marjorie was silent through pure sympathy. This young man spoke a language she understood better than that which some of her friends used—Mr. Babington, for instance. It was the Person of Jesus Christ that was all her religion to her; it was for this that she was devout, that she went to mass and the sacraments when she could; it was this that made Mary dear to her. Was He not her son? And, above all, it was for this that she had sacrificed Robin: she could not bear that he should not serve Him as a priest, if he might. But the other talk that she had heard sometimes—of the place of religion in politics, and the justification of this or that course of public action—well, she knew that

these things must be so; yet it was not the manner of her own most intimate thought, and the language of it was not hers.

The two went together so a few paces, without speaking. Then she had a sudden impulse.

"And do you ever think of what may come upon you?" she asked. "Do you ever think of the end?"

"Aye," he said.

"And what do you think the end will be?"

She saw him raise his eyes to her an instant.

"I think," he said, "that I shall die for my faith some day."

That same strange shiver that passed over her at her mother's bedside, passed over her again, as if material things grew thin about her. There was a tone in his voice that made it absolutely clear to her that he was not speaking of a fancy, but of some certain knowledge that he had. Yet she dared not ask him, and she was a middle-aged woman before the news came to her of his death upon the rack.

IV.

It was a sleepy-eyed young man that came into the kitchen early next morning, where the ladies and the maids were hard at work all together upon the business of baking. The baking was a considerable task each week, for there were not less than twenty mouths, all told, to feed in the hall day by day, including a widow or two that called each day for rations; and a great part, therefore, of a mistress's time in such houses was taken up with such things.

Marjorie turned to him, with her arms floured to the elbow.

"Well?" she said, smiling.

"I have done, mistress. Will it please you to see it before I go and sleep?"

They had examined the house carefully last night, measuring and sounding in the deep and thin walls alike, for there was at present no convenience at all for a hunted man. Owen had obtained her consent to two or three alternative proposals, and she had then left him to himself. From her bed, that she had had prepared, with Alice Babington's, in a loft—turning out for the night the farm-men who had usually slept there, she had heard more than once the sound of distant hammering from the main front of the house where her own room lay, that had been once her mother's as well.

The possibilities in this little manor were small. To construct a passage, giving an exterior escape, as had been made in some houses, would have meant here a labour of weeks, and she had told the young man she would be content with a simple hiding-hole. Yet, although she did not expect great things, and knew, moreover, the kind of place that he would make, she was as excited as a child, in a grave sort of way, at what she would see.

He took her first into the parlour, where years ago Robin had talked with her in the wintry sunshine. The open chimney was on the right as they entered, and though she knew that somewhere on that same side would be one of the two entrances that had been arranged, all the difference she could see was that a piece of the wall-hanging that had been between the window and the

fire was gone, and that there hung in its place an old picture painted on a panel. She looked at this without speaking: the wall was wainscoted in oak, as it had always been, six feet up from the floor. Then an idea came to her: she tilted the picture on one side. But there was no more to be seen than a cracked panel, which, it seemed to her, had once been nearer the door. She rapped upon this, but it gave back the dull sound as of wood against stone.

She turned to the young man, smiling. He smiled back.

"Come into the bedroom, mistress."

He led her in there, through the passage outside into which the two doors opened at the head of the outside stairs; but here, too, all that she could see was that a tall press that had once stood between the windows now stood against the wall immediately opposite to the painted panel on the other side of the wall. She opened the doors of the press, but it was as it had always been: there even hung there the three or four dresses that she had taken from it last night and laid on the bed.

She laughed outright, and, turning, saw Mrs. Alice Babington beaming tranquilly from the door of the room.

"Come in, Alice," she said, "and see this miracle."

Then he began to explain it.

On this side was the entrance proper, and, as he said so, he stepped up into the press and closed the doors. They could hear him fumbling within, then the sound of wood sliding, and finally a muffled voice calling to them. Marjorie flung the doors open, and, save

for the dresses, it was empty. She stared in for a moment, still hearing the movements of someone beyond, and at last the sound of a snap; and as she withdrew her head to exclaim to Alice, the young man walked into the room through the open door behind her.

Then he explained it in full.

The back of the press had been removed, and then replaced, in such a manner that it would slide out about eighteen inches towards the window, but only when the doors of the press were closed; when they were opened, they drew out simultaneously a slip of wood on either side that pulled the sliding door tight and immovable. Behind the back of the press, thus removed, a corresponding part of the wainscot slid in the same way, giving a narrow doorway into the cell which he had excavated between the double beams of the thick wall. Next, when the person that had taken refuge was inside, with the two sliding doors closed behind him, it was possible for him, by an extremely simple device, to turn a wooden button and thus release a little wooden machinery which controlled a further opening into the parlour, and which, at the same time, was braced against the hollow panelling and one of the higher beams in such a manner as to give it, when knocked upon, the dullness of sound the girl had noticed just now. But this door could only be opened from within. Neither a fugitive nor a pursuer could make any entrance from the parlour side, unless the wainscoting itself were torn off. Lastly, the crack in the woodwork, corresponding with two minute holes bored in the painted panel, afforded, when the picture was hung exactly straight,

a view of the parlour that commanded nearly all the room.

"I do not pretend that it is a fortress," said the young man, smiling gravely. "But it may serve to keep out a country constable. And, indeed, it is the best I can contrive in this house."

CHAPTER VII.

I.

MARJORIE found it curious, even to herself, how the press that faced the foot of the two beds where she and Alice slept side by side, became associated in her mind with the thought of Robin; and she began to perceive that it was largely with the thought of him in her intention that the idea had first presented itself of having the cell constructed at all. It was not that in her deliberate mind she conceived that he would be hunted, that he would fly here, that she would save him; but rather in that strange realm of consciousness which is called sometimes the Imagination, and sometimes by other names—that inner shadow-show on which move figures cast by the two worlds—she perceived him in this place. . . .

It was in the following winter that she was reminded of him by other means than those of his letters.

The summer and autumn had passed tranquilly enough, so far as this outlying corner of England was concerned. News filtered through of the stirring world outside, and especially was there conveyed to her, through Alice for the most part, news that concerned

the fortunes of Catholics. Politics, except in this connection, meant little enough to such as her. She heard, indeed, from time to time vague rumours of fighting, and of foreign Powers; and thought now and again of Spain, as of a country that might yet be, in God's hand, an instrument for the restoring of God's cause in England; she had heard, too, in this year, of one more rumour of the Queen's marriage with the Duke d'Alençon, and then of its final rupture. But these matters were aloof from her; rather she pondered such things as the execution of two more priests at York in August, Mr. Lacy and Mr. Kirkman, and of a third, Mr. Thompson, in November at the same place. It was on such affairs as these that she pondered as she went about her household business, or sat in the chamber upstairs with Mistress Alice; and it was of these things that she talked with the few priests that came and went from time to time in their circuits about Derbyshire. It was a life of quietness and monotony inconceivable by those who live in towns. Its sole incident lay in that life which is called Interior. . . .

It was soon after the New Year that she met the squire of Matstead face to face.

She and Alice, with Janet and a man riding behind, were on their way back from Derby, where they had gone for their monthly shopping. They had slept at Dethick, and had had news there of Mr. Anthony, who was again in the south on one of his mysterious missions, and started again soon after dawn next day to reach home, if they could, for dinner.

She knew Alice now for what she was—a woman of

astounding dullness, of sterling character, and of a complete inability to understand any shades or tones of character or thought that were not her own, and yet a friend in a thousand, of an immovable stability and loyalty, one of no words at all, who dwelt in the midst of a steady kind of light which knew no dawn nor sunset. The girl entertained herself sometimes with conceiving of her friend confronted with the rack, let us say, or the gallows; and perceived that she knew with exactness what her behaviour would be: She would do all that was required of her without speeches or protest; she would place herself in the required positions, with a faint smile, unwavering; she would suffer or die with the same tranquil steadiness as that in which she lived; and, best of all, she would not be aware, even for an instant, that anything in her behaviour was in the least admirable or exceptional. She resembled, to Marjorie's mind, that for which a strong and well-built armchair stands in relation to the body: it is the same always, supporting and sustaining always, and cannot even be imagined as anything else.

It was a brilliant frosty day, as they rode over the rutted track between hedges that served for a road, that ran, for the most part, a field or two away from the black waters of the Derwent. The birches stood about them like frozen feathers; the vast chestnuts towered overhead, motionless in the motionless air. As they came towards Matstead, and, at last, rode up the street, naturally enough Marjorie again began to think of Robin. As they came near where the track turned the corner beneath the churchyard wall, where once Robin

had watched, himself unseen, the three riders go by, she had to attend to her horse, who slipped once or twice on the paved causeway. Then as she lifted her head again, she saw, not three yards from her, and on a level with her own face, the face of the squire looking at her from over the wall.

She had not seen him, except once in Derby, a year or two before, and that at a distance, since Robin had left England; and at the sight she started so violently, in some manner jerking the reins that she held, that her horse, tired with the long ride of the day before, slipped once again, and came down all asprawl on the stones, fortunately throwing her clear of his struggling feet. She was up in a moment, but again sank down, aware that her foot was in some way bruised or twisted.

There was a clatter of hoofs behind her as the servants rode up; a child or two ran up the street, and when, at last, on Janet's arm, she rose again to her feet, it was to see the squire staring at her, with his hands clasped behind his back.

"Bring the ladies up to the house," he said abruptly to the man; and then, taking the rein of the girl's horse that had struggled up again, he led the way, without another word, without even turning his head, round to the way that ran up to his gates.

II.

It was not with any want of emotion that Marjorie found herself presently meekly seated upon Alice's horse,

and riding up at a foot's-pace beneath the gatehouse of the Hall. Rather it was the balance of emotions that made her so meek and so obedient to her friend's tranquil assumption that she must come in as the squire said. She was aware of a strong resentment to his brusque order, as well as to the thought that it was to the house of an apostate that she was going; yet there was a no less strong emotion within her that he had a sort of right to command her. These feelings, working upon her, dazed as she was by the sudden sharpness of her fall, and the pain in her foot, combined to drive her along in a kind of resignation in the wake of the squire.

Still confused, yet with a rapid series of these same emotions running before her mind, she limped up the steps, supported by Alice and her maid, and sat down on a bench at the end of the hall. The squire, who had shouted an order or two to a peeping domestic, as he passed up the court, came to her immediately with a cup in his hand.

"You must drink this at once, mistress."

She took it at once, drank and set it down, aware of the keen, angry-looking face that watched her.

"You will dine here, too, mistress—" he began, still with a sharp kindness. . . . And then, on a sudden, all grew dark about her; there was a roaring in her ears, and she fainted.

She came out of her swoon again, after awhile, with that strange and innocent clearness that usually follows such a thing, to find Alice beside her, a tapestried wall behind Alice, and the sound of a crackling fire in

her ears. Then she perceived that she was in a small room, lying on her back along a bench, and that someone was bathing her foot.

"I . . . I will not stay here——" she began. But two hands held her firmly down, and Alice's reassuring face was looking into her own.

When her mind ran clearly again, she sat up with a sudden movement, drawing her foot away from Janet's ministrations.

"I do very well," she said, after looking at her foot, and then putting it to the ground amid a duet of protestations. (She had looked round the room to satisfy herself that no one else was there, and had seen that it must be the parlour that she was in. A newly-lighted fire burned on the hearth, and the two doors were closed.)

Then Alice explained.

It was impossible, she said, to ride on at once; the horse even now was being bathed in the stable, as his mistress in the parlour. The squire had been most considerate; he had helped to carry her in here just now, had lighted the fire with his own hands, and had stated that dinner would be sent in here in an hour for the three women. He had offered to send one of his own men on to Booth's Edge with the news, if Mistress Marjorie found herself unable to ride on after dinner.

"But . . . but it is Mr. Audrey!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"Yes, my dear," said Alice. "I know it is. But that does not mend your foot," she said, with unusual curtness. And Marjorie saw that she still looked at her anxiously.

The three women dined together, of course, in an hour's time. There was no escape from the pressure of circumstance. It was unfortunate that such an accident should have fallen out here, in the one place in all the world where it should not; but the fact was a fact. Meanwhile, it was not only resentment that Marjorie felt: it was a strange sort of terror as well—a terror of sitting in the house of an apostate—of one who had freely and deliberately renounced that faith for which she herself lived so completely; and that it was the father of one whom she knew as she knew Robin—with whose fate, indeed, her own had been so intimately entwined—this combined to increase that indefinable fear that rested on her as she stared round the walls, and sat over the food and drink that this man provided.

The climax came as they were finishing dinner: for the door from the hall opened abruptly, and the squire came in. He bowed to the ladies, as the manner was, straightening his trim, tight figure again defiantly; asked a civil question or two; directed a servant behind him to bring the horses to the parlour door in half an hour's time; and then snapped out the sentence which he was, plainly, impatient to speak.

"Mistress Manners," he said. "I wish to have a word with you privately."

Marjorie, trembling at his presence, turned a wavering face to her friend; and Alice, before the other could speak, rose up, and went out, with Janet following.

"Janet——" cried the girl.

"If you please," said the old man, with such a decisive air that she hesitated. Then she nodded at her maid; and a moment later the door closed.

III.

"I have two matters to speak of," said the squire abruptly, sitting down in the chair that Alice had left; "the first concerns you closely; and the other less closely."

She looked at him, summoning all her power to appear at her ease.

He seemed far older than when she had last spoken with him, perhaps five years ago; and had grown a little pointed beard; his hair, too, seemed thinner—such of it as she could see beneath the house-cap that he wore; his face, especially about his blue, angry-looking eyes, was covered with fine wrinkles, and his hands were clearly the hands of an old man, at once delicate and sinewy. He was in a dark suit, still with his cloak upon him; and in low boots. He sat still as upright as ever, turned a little in his chair, so as to clasp its back with one strong hand.

"Yes, sir?" she said.

"I will begin with the second first. It is of my son Robin: I wish to know what news you have of him. He hath not written to me this six months back. And I hear that letters sometimes come to you from him."

Marjorie hesitated.

"He is very well, so far as I know," she said.

"And when is he to be made priest?" he demanded sharply.

Marjorie drew a breath to give herself time; she knew that she must not answer this; and did not know how to say so with civility.

"If he has not told you himself, sir," she said, "I cannot."

The old man's face twitched; but he kept his manners.

"I understand you, mistress. . . ." But then his wrath overcame him. "But he must understand he will have no mercy from me, if he comes my way. I am a magistrate, now, mistress, and——"

A thought like an inspiration came to the girl; and she interrupted; for she longed to penetrate this man's armour.

"Perhaps that was why he did not tell you when he was to be made priest," she said.

The other seemed taken aback.

"Why, but——"

"He did not wish to think that his father would be untrue to his new commission," she said, trembling at her boldness and yet exultant too; and taking no pains to keep the irony out of her voice.

Again that fierce twitch of the features went over the other's face; and he stared straight at her with narrowed eyes. Then a change again came over him; and he laughed, like barking, yet not all unkindly.

"You are very shrewd, mistress. But I wonder what you will think of me when I tell you the second matter, since you will tell me no more of the first."

He shifted his position in his chair, this time clasping both his hands together over the back.

"Well; it is this in a word," he said: "It is that you had best look to yourself, mistress. My lord Shrewsbury even knows of it."

"Of what, if you please?" asked the girl, hoping she had not turned white.

"Why, of the priests that come and go hereabouts! It is all known; and her Grace hath sent a message from the Council——"

"What has this to do with me?"

He laughed again.

"Well; let us take your neighbours at Padley. They will be in trouble if they do not look to their goings. Mr. FitzHerbert——"

But again she interrupted him. She was determined to know how much he knew. She had thought that she had been discreet enough, and that no news had leaked out of her own entertaining of priests; it was chiefly that discretion might be preserved that she had set her hands to the work at all. With Padley so near it was thought that less suspicion would be aroused. Her name had never yet come before the authorities, so far as she knew.

"But what has all this to do with me, sir?" she asked, sharply. "It is true that I do not go to church, and that I pay my fines when they are demanded. Are there new laws, then, against the old faith?"

She spoke with something of real bitterness. It was genuine enough; her only art lay in her not concealing it; for she was determined to press her question home. And, in his shrewd, compelling face, she read her answer even before his words gave it.

"Well, mistress; it was not of you that I meant to speak—so much as of your friends. They are your friends, not mine. And as your friends, I thought it to be a kindly action to send them an advertisement. If they are not careful, there will be trouble."

"At Padley?"

"At Padley, or elsewhere. It is the persons that fall under the law, not places!"

"But, sir, you are a magistrate; and——"

He sprang up, his face aflame with real wrath.

"Yes, mistress; I am a magistrate: the commission hath come at last, after six months' waiting. But I was friend to the FitzHerberts before ever I was a magistrate, and——"

Then she understood; and her heart went out to him. She, too, stood up, catching at the table with a hiss of pain as she threw her weight on the bruised foot. He made a movement towards her; but she waved him aside.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Audrey, with all my heart. I had thought that you meant harm, perhaps, to my friends and me. But now I see——"

"Not a word more! not a word more!" he cried harshly, with a desperate kind of gesture. "I shall do my duty none the less when the time comes——"

"Sir!" she cried out suddenly. "For God's sake do not speak of duty—there is another duty greater than that. Mr. Audrey——"

He wheeled away from her, with a movement she could not interpret. It might be uncontrolled anger or misery, equally. And her heart went out to him in one great flood.

"Mr. Audrey. It is not too late. Your son Robin——"

Then he wheeled again; and his face was distorted with emotion.

"Yes, my son Robin! my son Robin! . . . How dare

you speak of him to me? . . . Yes; that is it—my son Robin—my son Robin!”

He dropped into the chair again, and his face fell upon his clasped hands.

IV.

She scarcely knew how circumstances had arranged themselves up to the time when she found herself riding away again with Alice, while a man of Mr. Audrey's led her horse. They could not talk freely till he left them at the place where the stony road turned to a soft track, and it was safe going once more. Then Alice told her own side of it.

“Yes, my dear; I heard him call out. I was walking in the hall with Janet, to keep ourselves warm. But when I ran in he was sitting down, and you were standing. What was the matter?”

“Alice,” said the girl earnestly, “I wish you had not come in. He is very heartbroken, I think. He would have told me more, I think. It is about his son.”

“His son! Why, he——”

“Yes; I know that. And he would not see him if he came back. He has had his magistrate's commission; and he will be true to it. But he is heartbroken for all that. He has not really lost the Faith, I think.”

“Why, my dear; that is foolish. He is very hot in Derby, I hear, against the Papists. There was a poor woman who could not pay her fines; and——”

Marjorie waved it aside.

“Yes; he would be very hot; but for all that, there

is his son Robin you know—and his memories. And Robin has not written to him for six months. That would be about the time when he told him he was to be a magistrate.”

Then Marjorie told her of the whole that had passed, and of his mention of the FitzHerberts.

“And what he meant by that,” she said, “I do not know; but I will tell them.”

She was pondering deeply all the way as she rode home. Mistress Alice was one of those folks who, so long as they are answered in words are content; and Marjorie so answered her. And all the while she thought upon Robin, and his passionate old father, and attempted to understand the emotions that fought in the heart that had so disclosed itself to her—its aged obstinacy, its loyalty and its confused honourableness. She knew very well that he would do what he conceived to be his duty with all the more zeal if it were an unpleasant duty; and she thanked God that it was not for a good while yet that the lad would come home a priest.

CHAPTER VIII.

I.

THE warning which she had had with regard to her friends, and which she wrote on to them at once, received its fulfilment within a very few weeks. Mr. John, who was on the eve of departure for London again to serve his brother there, who was back again in the Fleet by now, wrote that he knew very well that they were all under suspicion, that he had sent on to his son the message she had given, but that he hoped they would yet weather the storm.

"And as to yourself, Mistress Marjorie," he wrote, "this makes it all the more necessary that Booth's Edge should not be suspected; for what will our men do if Padley be closed to them? You have heard of our friend Mr. Garlick's capture? But that was no fault of yours. The man was warned. I hear that they will send him into banishment, only, this time."

The news came to her as she sat in the garden over her needlework on a hot evening in June. There it was as cool as anywhere in the countryside. She sat at the top of the garden, where her mother and she had sat with Robin so long before; the breeze that came over

the moor bore with it the scent of the heather; and the bees were busy in the garden flowers about her.

It was first the gallop of a horse that she heard; and even at that sound she laid down her work and stood up. But the house below her blocked the most of her view; and she sat down again when she heard the dull rattle of the hoofs die away again. When she next looked up a man was running towards her from the bottom of the garden, and Janet was peeping behind him from the gate into the court. As she again stood up, she saw that it was Dick Sampson.

He was so out of breath, first with his ride and next with his run up the steep path, that for a moment or two he could not speak. He was dusty, too, from foot to knee; his cap was awry and his collar unbuttoned.

"It is Mr. Thomas, mistress," he gasped presently. "I was in Derby and saw him being taken to the gaol. . . . I could not get speech with him. . . . I rode straight up to Padley, and found none there but the servants, and them knowing nothing of the matter. And so I rode on here, mistress."

He was plainly all aghast at the blow. Hitherto it had been enough that Sir Thomas was in ward for his religion; and to this they had become accustomed. But that the heir should be taken, too, and that without a hint of what was to happen, was wholly unexpected. She made him sit down, and presently drew from him the whole tale.

Mr. Anthony Babington, his master, was away to London again, leaving the house in Derby in the hands of the servants. He then—Dick Sampson—was riding out early to take a horse to be shod, and had come

back through the town-square, when he saw the group ride up to the gaol door near the Friar Gate. He, too, had ridden up to ask what was forward, and had been just in time to see Mr. Thomas taken in. He had caught his eye, but had feigned not to know him. Then the man had attempted to get at what had happened from one of the fellows at the door, but could get no more from him than that the prisoner was a known and confessed recusant, and had been laid by the heels according to orders, it was believed, sent down by the Council. Then Dick had ridden slowly away till he had turned the corner, and then, hot foot for Padley.

"And I heard the fellow say to one of his company that an informer was coming down from London on purpose to deal with Mr. Thomas."

Marjorie felt a sudden pang; for she had never forgotten the one she had set eyes on in the Tower.

"His name?" she said breathlessly. "Did you hear his name?"

"It was Topcliffe, mistress," said Dick indifferently. "The other called it out."

Marjorie sat silent. Not only had the blow fallen more swiftly than she would have thought possible, but it was coupled with a second of which she had never dreamed. That it was this man, above all others, that should have come; this man, who stood to her mind, by a mere chance, for all that was most dreadful in the sinister forces arrayed against her—this brought misery down on her indeed. For, besides her own personal reasons for terror, there was, besides, the knowledge that the bringing of such a man at all from London on such

business meant that the movement beginning here in her own country was not a mere caprice.

She sat silent then—seeing once more before her the wide court of the Tower, the great keep opposite, and in the midst that thin figure moving to his hateful business. . . . And she knew now, in this instant, as never before, that the chief reason for her terror was that she had coupled in her mind her own friend Robin with the thought of this man, as if by some inner knowledge that their lives must cross some day—a knowledge which she could neither justify nor silence. Thank God, at least, that Robin was still safe in Rheims!

II.

She sent him off after a couple of hours' rest, during which once more he had told his story to Mistress Alice, with a letter to Mr. Thomas's wife, who, no doubt, would have followed her lord to Derby. She had gone apart with Alice, while Dick ate and drank, to talk the affair out, and had told her of Topcliffe's presence, at which news even the placid face of her friend looked troubled; but they had said nothing more on the point, and had decided that a letter should be written in Mistress Babington's name, offering Mrs. FitzHerbert the hospitality of Babington House, and any other services she might wish. Further, they had decided that the best thing to do was to go themselves to Derby next day, in order to be at hand; since Mr. John was in London, and the sooner Mrs. Thomas had friends with her, the better.

"They may keep him in ward a long time," said Mistress Alice, "before they bring him into open court—to try his courage. That is the way they do. The charge, no doubt, will be that he has harboured and assisted priests."

It seemed to Marjorie, as she lay awake that night, staring through the summer dusk at the tall press which hid so much beside her dresses, that the course on which her life moved was coming near to the rapids. Ever since she had first put her hand to the work, ever since, even, she had first offered her lover to God and let him go from her, it appeared as if God had taken her at her word, and accepted in an instant that which she offered so tremblingly. Her sight of London—the great buildings, the crowds, the visible forces of the Crown, the company of gallant gentlemen who were priests beneath their ruffs and feathers, the Tower, her glimpse of Topcliffe—these things had shown her the dreadful reality that lay behind this gentle scheming up in Derbyshire. Again, there was Mr. Babington; here, too, she had perceived a mystery which she could not understand: something moved behind the surface of which not even Mr. Babington's sister knew anything, except that, indeed, it was there. Again, there was the death of Father Campion—the very man whom she had taken as a symbol of the Faith for which she fought with her woman's wits; there was the news that came so suddenly and terribly now and again, of one more priest gone to his death. . . . It was like the slow rising of a storm: the air darkens; a stillness falls on the countryside; the chirp of the birds seems as a plaintive

word of fear; then the thunder begins—a low murmur far across the horizons; then a whisk of light, seen and gone again, and another murmur after it. And so it gathers, dusk on dusk, stillness on stillness, murmur on murmur, deepening and thickening; yet still no rain, but a drop or two that falls and ceases again. And from the very delay it is all the more dreadful; for the storm itself must break some time, and the artillery war in the heavens, and the rain rush down, and flash follow flash, and peal peal, and the climax come.

So, then, it was with her. There was no drawing back now, even had she wished it. And she wished it indeed, though she did not will it; she knew that she must stand in her place, now more than ever, when the blow had fallen so near. Now more than ever must she be discreet and resolute, since Padley itself was fallen, in effect, if not in fact; and Booth's Edge, in this valley at least, was the one hope of hunted men. She must stand, then, in her place; she must plot and conspire and scheme; she must govern her face and her manner more perfectly than ever, for the sake of that tremendous Cause.

As she lay there, listening to her friend's breathing in the darkness, staring now at the doors of the press, now at the baggage that lay heaped ready for the early start, these and a thousand other thoughts passed before her. It was a long plot that had ended in this: it must have reached its maturity weeks ago; the decision to strike must have been reached before even Squire Audrey had given her the warning—for it was only by chance that she had met him and he had told her. . . . And he, too, Robin's father, would be in the midst of it all;

he, too, that was a Catholic by baptism, must sit with the other magistrates and threaten and cajole as the manner was; and quiet Derby would be all astir; and the Bassetts would be there, and Mr. Fenton, to see how their friend fared in the dock; and the crowds would gather to see the prisoner brought out, and the hunt would be up. And she herself, she, too, must be there with the tearful little wife, who could do so little. . . .

Thank God Robin was safe in Rheims! . . .

III.

Derby was, indeed, astir as they rode in, with the servants and the baggage following behind, on the late afternoon of the next day. They had ridden by easy stages, halting at Dethick for dinner, where the Babingtons' house already hummed with dismay at the news that had come from Derby last night. Mr. Anthony was away, and all seemed distracted.

They rode in by the North road, seeing for the last mile or two of their ride the towering spire of All Saints' Church high above the smoke of the houses; they passed the old bridge half a mile from the market-place, near the ancient camp; and even here overheard a sentence or two from a couple of fellows that were leaning on the parapet, that told them what was the talk of the town. It was plain that others besides the Catholics understood the taking of Mr. Thomas FitzHerbert to be a very significant matter.

Babington House stood on the farther side of the

market-place from that on which they entered, and Alice was for going there through side streets.

"They will take notice if we go straight through," she said. "It is cheese-market to-day."

"They will take notice in any case," said Marjorie. "It will be over the town to-morrow that Mistress Babington is here, and it is best, therefore, to come openly, as if without fear."

And she turned to beckon the servants to draw up closer behind.

The square was indeed crowded as they came in. From all the country round, and especially from Dove-dale, the farmers came in on this day, or sent their wives, for the selling of cheeses; and the small oblong of the market—the smaller from its great Conduit and Cross—was full with rows of stalls and carts, with four lanes only left along the edges by which the traffic might pass; and even here the streams of passengers forced the horses to go in single file. Groups of men—farmers' servants who had driven in the carts, or walked with the pack-beasts—to whom this day was a kind of feast, stood along the edges of the booths eyeing all who went by. The inns, too, were doing a roaring trade, and it was from one of these that the only offensive comment was made.

Mistress Babington rode first, as suited her dignity, preceded by one of the Dethick men whom they had taken up on their way, and who had pushed forward when they came into the town to clear the road; and Mistress Manners rode after her. The men stood aside as the cavalcade began to go between the booths, and

the most of them saluted Mistress Babington. But as they were almost out of the market they came abreast one of the inns from whose wide-open doors came a roar of voices from those that were drinking within, and a group that was gathered on the step stopped talking as the party came up. Marjorie glanced at them, and noticed there was an air about two or three of the men that was plainly town-bred; there was a certain difference in the cut of their clothes and the way they wore them. Then she saw two or three whispering together, and the next moment came a brutal shout. She could not catch the sentence, but she heard the word "Papist" with an adjective, and caught the unmistakable bullying tone of the man. The next instant there broke out a confusion: a man dashed up the step from the crowd beneath, and she caught a glimpse of Dick Sampson's furious face. Then the group bore back, fighting, into the inn door; the Dethick servant leapt off his horse, leaving it in some fellow's hands, and vanished up the step; there was a rush of the crowd after him, and then the way was clear in front, over the little bridge that spanned Bramble brook.

When she drew level with Alice, she saw her friend's face, pale and agitated.

"It is the first time I have ever been cried at," she said. "Come; we are nearly home. There is St. Peter's spire."

"Shall we not——?" began Marjorie.

"No, no" (and the pale face tightened suddenly). "My fellows will give them a lesson. The crowd is on our side as yet."

IV.

As they rode in under the archway that led in beside the great doors of Babington House, three or four grooms ran forward at once. It was plain that their coming was looked for with some eagerness.

Alice's manner seemed curiously different from that of the quiet woman who had sat so patiently beside Marjorie in the manor among the hills: a certain air of authority and dignity sat on her now that she was back in her own place.

"Is Mrs. FitzHerbert here?" she asked from the groom who helped her to the ground.

"Yes, mistress; she came from the inn this morning, and——"

"Well?"

"She is in a great taking, mistress. She would eat nothing, they said."

Alice nodded.

"You had best be off to the inn," she said, with a jerk of her head. "A London fellow insulted us just now, and Sampson and Mallow——"

She said no more. The man who held her horse slipped the reins into the hands of the younger groom who stood by him, and was away and out of the court in an instant. Marjorie smiled a little, astonished at her own sense of exultation. The blows were not to be all on one side, she perceived. Then she followed Alice into the house.

As they came through into the hall by the side-door that led through from the court where they had dis-

mounted, a figure was plainly visible in the dusky light, going to and fro at the farther end, with a quick, nervous movement. The figure stopped as they advanced, and then darted forward, crying out piteously.

"Ah! you have come, thank God! thank God! They will not let me see him."

"Hush! hush!" said Alice, as she caught her in her arms.

"Mr. Bassett has been here," moaned the figure, "and he says it is Topcliffe himself who has come down on the matter. . . . He says he is the greatest devil of them all; and Thomas——"

Then she burst out crying again.

It was an hour before they could get the full tale out of her. They took her upstairs and made her sit down, for already a couple of faces peeped from the buttery, and the servants would have gathered in another five minutes; and together they forced her to eat and drink something, for she had not tasted food since her arrival at the inn yesterday; and so, little by little, they drew the story out.

Mr. Thomas and his wife were actually on their way from Norbury when the arrest had been made. Mr. Thomas had intended to pass a couple of nights in Derby on various matters of the estates; and although, his wife said, he had been somewhat silent and quiet since the warning had come to him from Mr. Audrey, even he had thought it no danger to ride through Derby on his way to Padley. He had sent a servant ahead to order rooms at the inn for those two nights, and it was through that, it appeared, that the news of his

coming had reached the ears of the authorities. However that was, and whether the stroke had been actually determined upon long before, or had been suddenly decided upon at the news of his coming, it fell out that, as the husband and wife were actually within sight of Derby, on turning a corner they had found themselves surrounded by men on horses, plainly gathered there for the purpose, with a magistrate in the midst. Their names had been demanded, and, upon Mr. Thomas' hesitation, they had been told that their names were well known, and a warrant was produced, on a charge of recusancy and of aiding her Grace's enemies, drawn out against Thomas FitzHerbert, and he had been placed under arrest. Further, Mrs. FitzHerbert had been told she must not enter the town with the party, but must go either before them or after them, which she pleased. She had chosen to go first, and had been at the windows of the inn in time to see her husband go by. There had been no confusion, she said; the townsfolk appeared to know nothing of what was happening until Mr. Thomas was safely lodged in the ward.

Then she burst out crying again, lamenting the horrible state of the prison, as it had been described to her, and demanding to know where God's justice was in allowing His faithful servants to be so tormented and harried. . . .

Marjorie watched her closely. She had met her once at Babington House, when she was still Elizabeth Westby, but had thought little or nothing of her since. She was a pale little creature, fair-haired and timorous,

and had now a hunted look of misery in her eyes that was very piteous to see. It was plain they had done right in coming: this woman would be of little service to her husband.

Then when Alice had said a word or two, Marjorie began her questions.

"Tell me," she said gently, "had you no warning of this?"

The girl shook her head.

"Not beyond that which came from yourself," she said; "and we never thought——"

"Hath Mr. Thomas had any priests with him lately?"

"We have not had one at Norbury for the last six months, whilst we were there, at least. My husband said it was better not, and that there was a plenty of places for them to go to."

"And you have not heard mass during that time?"

The girl looked at her with tear-stained eyes.

"No," she said. "But why do you ask that? My husband says——"

"And when was the first you heard of Topcliffe? And what have you heard of him?"

The other's face fell into lines of misery.

"I have heard he is the greatest devil her Grace uses. He hath authority to question priests and others in his own house. He hath a rack there that he boasts makes all others as Christmas toys. My husband——"

Marjorie patted her arm gently.

"There! there!" she said kindly. "Your husband is not in Topcliffe's house. There will be no question of that. He is here in his own county, and——"

"But that will not save him!" cried the girl. "Why——"

"Tell me," interrupted Marjorie, "was Topcliffe with the men that took Mr. Thomas?"

The other shook her head.

"No; I heard he was not. He was come from London yesterday morning. That was the first I heard of him."

Then Alice began again to soothe her gently, to tell her that her husband was in no great danger as yet, that he was well known for his loyalty, and to do her best to answer the girl's pitiful questions. And Marjorie sat back and considered.

Marjorie had a remarkable knowledge of the methods of the Government, gathered from the almost endless stories she had heard from travelling priests and others; it was her business, too, to know them. Two or three things, therefore, if the girl's account was correct, were plain. First, that this was a concerted plan, and not a mere chance arrest. Mr. Audrey's message to her showed so much, and the circumstances of Topcliffe's arrival confirmed it. Next, it must be more than a simple blow struck at one man, Mr. Thomas FitzHerbert: Topcliffe would not have come down from London at all unless it were a larger quarry than Mr. Thomas that was aimed at. Thirdly, and in conclusion, it would not be easy therefore to get Mr. Thomas released again. There remained a number of questions which she had as yet no means of answering. Was it because Mr. Thomas was heir to the enormous FitzHerbert estates in this country and elsewhere, that he was struck at? Or was it the beginning, merely, of a general assault

on Derbyshire, such as had taken place before she was born? Or was it that Mr. Thomas' apparent coolness towards the Faith (for that was evident by his not having heard mass for so long, and by his refusal to entertain priests just at present)—was it that lack of zeal on his part, which would, of course, be known to the army of informers scattered now throughout England, which had marked him out as the bird to be flown at? It would be, indeed, a blow to the Catholic gentry of the county, if any of the FitzHerberts should fall!

She stood up presently, grave with her thoughts. Mistress Alice glanced up.

"I am going out for a little," said Marjorie.

"But——"

"May two of your men follow me at a little distance? But I shall be safe enough. I am going to a friend's house."

Marjorie knew Derby well enough from the old days when she rode in sometimes with her father and slept at Mr. Biddell's; and, above all, she knew all that Derby had once been. In one place, outside the town, was St. Mary-in-Pratis, where the Benedictine nuns had lived; St. Leonhard's had had a hospital for lepers; St. Helen's had had the Augustinian hospital for poor brothers and sisters; St. Alkmund's had held a relic of its patron saint; all this she knew by heart; and it was bitter now to be here on such business. But she went briskly out from the hall, and ten minutes later she was knocking at the door of a little attorney, the old partner of her father's, whose house faced the Guildhall across the

little market-square. It was opened by an old woman who smiled at the sight of her.

"Eh! come in, mistress. The master saw you ride into town. He is in the upstairs parlour, with Mr. Bassett."

The girl nodded to her bodyguard, and followed the old woman in. She bowed as she passed the lawyer's confidential clerk and servant, Mr. George Beaton, in the passage—a big man, with whom she had had communications more than once on popish affairs.

Mr. John Biddell, like Marjorie's own father and his partner, was one of those quiet folks who live through storms without attracting attention from the elements, yet without the sacrifice of principle. He was a Catholic, and never pretended to be anything else; but he was so little and so harmless that no man ever troubled him. He pleaded before the magistrates unobtrusively and deftly; and would have appeared before her Grace herself or the Lord of Hell, with the same timid and respectful air, in his iron-rimmed spectacles, his speckless dark suit, and his little black cap drawn down to his ears. He had communicated with Marjorie again and again in the last two or three years on the subject of wandering priests, calling them "gentlemen" with the greatest care, and allowing no indiscreet word ever to appear in his letters. He remembered King Harry, whom he had seen once in a visit of his to London; he had assisted the legal authorities considerably in the restoration under Queen Mary; and he had soundlessly acquiesced in the changes again under Elizabeth—so far, at least, as mere law was concerned.

Mr. William Bassett was a very different man. First he was the brother-in-law of Sir Thomas FitzHerbert himself; and was entirely of the proper spirit to mate with that fearless family. He had considerable estates, both at Langley and Blore, in both of which places he cheerfully evaded the new laws, maintaining and helping priests in all directions; a man, in fact, of an ardent and boisterous faith which he extended (so the report ran) even to magic and astrology; a man of means, too, in spite of his frequent fines for recusancy, and aged about fifty years old at this time, with a high colour in his face and bright, merry eyes. Marjorie had spoken with him once or twice only.

These two men, then, first turned round in their chairs, and then stood up to salute Marjorie, as she came into the upstairs parlour. It was a somewhat dark room, panelled where there was space for it between the books, and with two windows looking out onto the square.

"I thought we should see you soon," said the attorney. "We saw you come, mistress; and the fellows that cried out on you."

"They had their deserts," said Marjorie, smiling.

Mr. Bassett laughed aloud.

"Indeed they did," he said in his deep, pleasant voice. "There were two of them with bloody noses before all was done. . . . You have come for the news, I suppose, mistress?"

He eyed her genially and approvingly. He had heard a great deal of this young lady in the last three or four years; and wished there were more of her kind.

"That is what I have come for," said Marjorie. "We have Mrs. Thomas over at Babington House."

"She'll be of no great service to her husband," said the other. "She cries and laments too much. Now——"

He stopped himself from paying his compliments. It seemed to him that this woman, with her fearless, resolute face, would do very well without them.

Then he set himself to relate the tale.

It seemed that little Mrs. Thomas had given a true enough report. It was true that Topcliffe had arrived from London on the morning of the arrest; and Mistress Manners was perfectly right in her opinion that this signified a good deal. But, it seemed to Mr. Bassett, the Council had made a great mistake in striking at the FitzHerberts. The quarry was too strong, he said, for such birds as the Government used — too strong and too many. For, first, no FitzHerbert had ever yet yielded in his allegiance either to the Church or to the Queen's Grace; and it was not likely that Mr. Thomas would begin: and, next, if one yielded (*suadente diabolo*, and *Deus avertat!*) a dozen more would spring up. But the position was serious for all that, said Mr. Bassett (and Mr. Biddell nodded assent), for who would deal with the estates and make suitable arrangements if the heir, who already largely controlled them, were laid by the heels? But that the largeness of the undertaking was recognised by the Council, was plain enough, in that no less a man than Topcliffe (Mr. Bassett spat on the floor as he named him), Topcliffe, "the devil possessed by worse devils," was sent down to take charge of the matter.

Marjorie listened carefully.

"You have no fear for yourself, sir?" she asked presently, as the man sat back in his chair.

Mr. Bassett smiled broadly, showing his strong white teeth between the iron-grey hair that fringed his lips.

"No; I have no fear," he said. "I have a score of my men quartered in the town."

"And the trial? When will that——"

"The trial! Why, I shall praise God if the trial falls this year. They will harry him before magistrates, no doubt; and they will squeeze him in private. But the trial! . . . Why, they have not a word of treason against him; and that is what they are after, no doubt."

"Treason?"

"Why, surely. That is what they seek to fasten upon us all. It would not sound well that Christian should shed Christian's blood for Christianity; but that her Grace should sorrowfully arraign her subjects whom she loves and cossets so much, for treason——. Why, that is as sound a cause as any in the law-books!"

He smiled in a manner that was almost a snarl, and his eyes grew narrow with ironic merriment.

"And Mr. Thomas——" began Marjorie hesitatingly.

He whisked his glance on her like lightning.

"Mr. Thomas will laugh at them all," he cried. "He is as staunch as any of his blood. I know he has been careful of late; but, then, you must remember how all the estates hang on him. But when he has his back to the wall—or on the rack for that matter—he will be as stiff as iron. They will have their work to bend him by a hair's breadth."

Marjorie drew a breath of relief. She did not question Mr. Bassett's judgment. But she had had an uneasy discomfort in her heart till he had spoken so plainly.

"Well, sir," she said, "that is what I chiefly came for. I wished to know if I could do aught for Mr. Thomas or his wife; and——"

"You can do a great deal for his wife," said he. "You can keep her quiet and comfort her. She needs it, poor soul! I have told her for her comfort that we shall have Thomas out again in a month—God forgive me for the lie!"

Marjorie stood up; and the men rose with her.

"Why, what is that?" she said; and went swiftly to the window; for the noise of the crying of the cheeses and the murmur of voices had ceased all on a sudden.

Straight opposite the window where she stood was the tiled flight of stairs that ran up from the marketplace to the first floor of the Guildhall, a great building where the business of the town was largely done, and where the magistrates sat when there was need; and a lane that was clear of booths and carts had been left leading from that door straight across the square, so that she could see the two little brobonets—or iron guns—that guarded the door on either side. It was up this lane that she looked, and down it that there advanced a little procession, the very sight of which, it seemed, had stricken the square to silence. Already the crowd was dividing from end to end, ranging itself on either side—farmers' men shambled out of the way and turned to see; women clambered on the carts holding up their children to see, and from across the square

came country-folk running, that they too might see. The steps of the Cross were already crowded with sight-seers.

Yet, to outward sight, the little procession was ordinary enough. First came three or four of the town-guard in livery, carrying their staves; then half a dozen sturdy fellows; then a couple of dignified gentlemen—one of them she knew: Mr. Roger Columbello, magistrate of the town—and then, walking all alone, the figure of a man, tall and thin, a little rustily, but very cleanly dressed in a dark suit, who carried his head stooping forward as if he were looking on the ground for something, or as if he deprecated so much notice.

Marjorie saw no more than this clearly. She did not notice the group of men that followed in case protection were needed for the agent of the Council, nor the crowd that swirled behind. For, as the solitary figure came beneath the windows she recognised the man whom she had seen once in the Tower of London.

“God smite the man!” growled a voice in her ear. “That is Topcliffe, going to the prison, I daresay.”

And as Marjorie turned her pale face back, she saw the face of kindly Mr. Bassett, suffused and convulsed with fury.

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